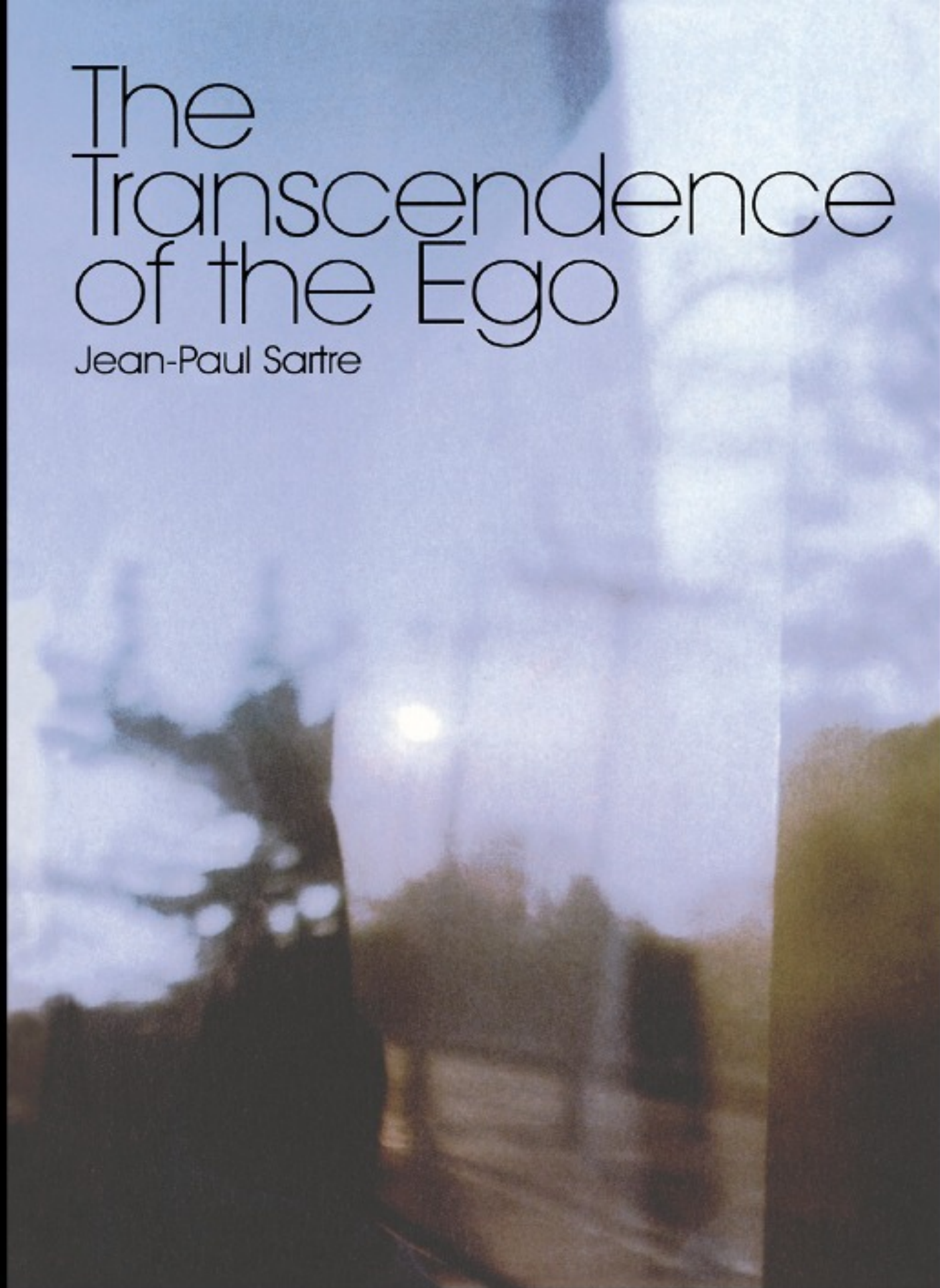


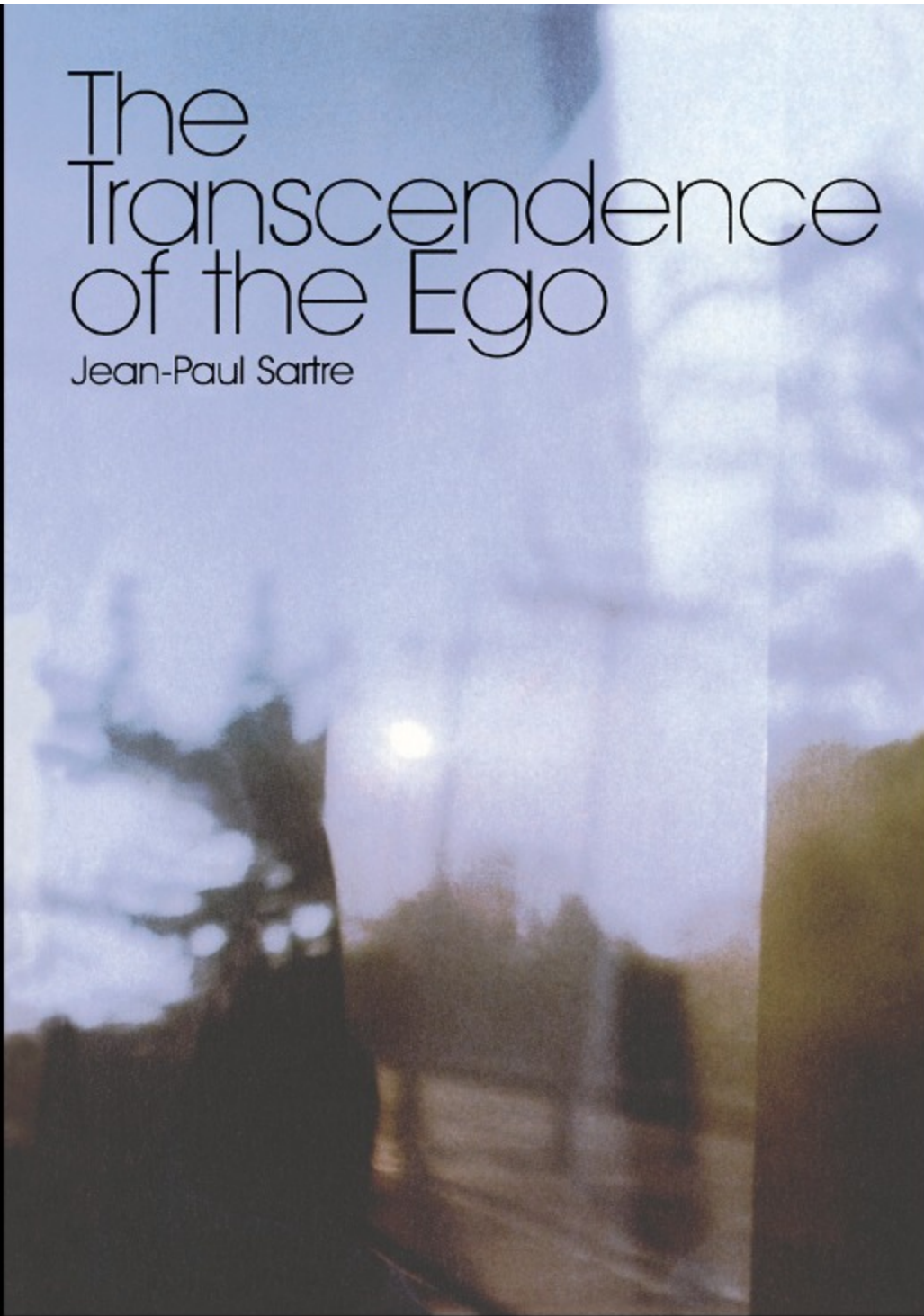
# The Transcendence of the Ego

Jean-Paul Sartre



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First published in France in 1937 as a journal article, *The Transcendence of the Ego* was one of Jean-Paul Sartre's earliest philosophical publications. When it appeared, Sartre was still largely unknown, working as a school teacher in provincial France and struggling to find a publisher for his most famous fictional work, *Nausea*.

*The Transcendence of the Ego* is the outcome of Sartre's intense engagement with the philosophy of Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology. Here, as in many subsequent writings, Sartre embraces Husserl's vision of phenomenology as the proper method for philosophy. But he argues that Husserl's conception of the self as an inner entity, 'behind' conscious experience is mistaken and phenomenologically unfounded.

*The Transcendence of the Ego* offers a brilliant diagnosis of where Husserl went wrong, and a radical alternative account of the self as a product of consciousness, situated in the world.

This essay introduces many of the themes central to Sartre's major work, *Being and Nothingness*: the nature of consciousness, the problem of self-knowledge, other minds, anguish. It demonstrates their presence and importance in Sartre's thinking from the very outset of his career.

This fresh translation makes this classic work available again to students of Sartre, phenomenology, existentialism, and twentieth century philosophy. It includes a thorough and illuminating introduction by Sarah Richmond, placing Sartre's essay in its philosophical and historical context.

Translated by **Andrew Brown**, University of Cambridge.

*Jean-Paul Sartre*

# **The Transcendence of the Ego**

*A sketch for a phenomenological  
description*

*Translated by Andrew Brown  
With an introduction by Sarah Richmond*



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# INTRODUCTION

Sarah Richmond

Jean-Paul Sartre's *The Transcendence of the Ego* (hereafter *TE*) first appeared as an article in the French academic journal, *Recherches Philosophiques* in 1937. It was among Sartre's first philosophical publications, the outcome of a period of intense critical engagement with the phenomenological philosophy of Edmund Husserl (1859–1938). Sartre had become interested in phenomenology earlier in the 1930s and devoted much of the year (1933/4) that he spent as a scholar in the French Institute in Berlin to a close study of Husserl's writings. At the time, the publication of *TE* was an event of minor significance, making available to an academic franco-phone readership a brief contribution by a young school-teacher to a debate which (although its topic—the self—was of central philosophical importance) was conducted here within the esoteric idiom of phenomenology.

From today's standpoint, the historical importance of *TE* massively compounds its inherent philosophical interest, and this excellent new translation by Andrew Brown provides a welcome opportunity to re-examine it. *TE* demonstrates the presence in Sartre's thinking from its earliest stage of ideas which, although not yet consciously entertained as such, were to become central tenets within his existentialist philosophy. Sartre's hostility to a conception of the self as an 'inner' entity at the core of individual human beings, playing an explanatory role in relation to their experience, is clearly conveyed in *TE*, along with his rejection of any psychology that trades on such a conception. Sartre's own conception of consciousness as 'absolute', insubstantial, and transparent is also voiced here, and his negative attitude towards Freudian psychoanalysis, based on its denial of these features, is briefly expressed.

*TE* also provides the first instance in print of Sartre's attempt to define his relationship with one of his most important early interlocutors, Husserl.

Recollecting, a few years later, the period in the early 1930s when he immersed himself in Husserl's phenomenological writings, Sartre wrote in his *War Diaries* that before he could move on to study Martin Heidegger's philosophy, he had first to *exhaust* Husserl's thinking. 'For me, moreover, to exhaust a philosophy is to reflect within its perspectives, and create my own private ideas at its expense, until I plunge into a blind alley' (Sartre 1984, pp. 183–4). *TE* provides an excellent example of the parasitic creativity to which Sartre refers. And despite its moments of undeniable brilliance, one can glimpse, now and again, at least the threat of a blind alley.

The opening pages of *TE* do not focus in the first instance on Husserl. The problem of the self with which Sartre is concerned belongs to philosophy quite generally, and Sartre's bold initial declaration of intent is stated in general terms: 'I should like to show here that the Ego is neither formally nor materially in consciousness: it is outside, *in the world*; it is a being in the world, like the Ego of another' (p. 1 in this volume; hereafter simple page nos. in parentheses will refer to pages in this volume).

Sartre suggests that the view he is contesting is widely held: he attributes it, in this first paragraph, not only to 'most philosophers', but also to 'psychologists'. Nonetheless, and notwithstanding Sartre's use of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* as a way in to his problem, it soon becomes clear that his main opponent is Husserl.

This is indicated, too, by the title of Sartre's essay. Sartre's use of the term 'transcendence' follows Husserl's, and refers to an opposition central to Husserl's thought. In Husserl's usage, an object of consciousness is 'immanent' if all its parts are contained within a single conscious experience. A sensation, for example, is 'inherent' within consciousness: it is presented in its entirety, 'lived through', as Husserl puts it. A 'transcendent' object, on the other hand, has aspects some of which always exceed—'transcend'—a particular experience of it. Material objects are transcendent in this sense: visual perception, for example, cannot present a material object 'all at once', but only perspectively. Looked at from the front, the back of the object remains unseen.

Sartre claims, more controversially, that the Ego is also transcendent, that it is not an 'inhabitant' of consciousness. The title, moreover, lends itself to a double reading that it is possible Sartre meant to exploit. The 'transcendence of the Ego' is the essay's *subject matter*: Sartre wishes to establish that the Ego is transcendent. At the same time it can be understood



as an *activity* that Sartre is recommending. In the ordinary sense of ‘transcend’, in which it simply means ‘to go beyond’, Sartre is urging his readers to transcend the Ego that philosophers have wrongly imposed on us.

*TE* has two parts. In the first, negative part, Sartre’s procedure accords with the passage from his *War Diaries*: he ‘exhausts’ what Husserl has to offer, and thinks ‘at his expense’. Sartre takes up Husserl’s account of the transcendental Ego, in order to argue that Husserl’s own thinking ought not to have admitted it. In the second part of the essay, Sartre offers, in place of Husserl’s false conception, a positive account of the ‘constitution’ of the Ego.

A brief survey of the main elements of Husserl’s phenomenological approach that Sartre takes up in *TE* will help at this point to clarify his strategy of internal critique.

## *HUSSERL’S PHENOMENOLOGY*

It is important to note that although the term ‘phenomenology’ is used today to denote a *movement* within European philosophy (whose ‘classical’ period begins with the work of Franz Brentano in the late nineteenth century, and spans the first forty years or so of the twentieth), this was not how Husserl saw it. For Husserl, phenomenology was the only possible form that genuine philosophical enquiry could take: the proposed methodology was the only way, Husserl contended, that philosophy could proceed ‘as a rigorous science’. In many of his writings Husserl laments, just as Kant had before him, the lack of a rationally grounded and universally recognizable basis for philosophy. The ‘radical new beginning’ Husserl delineates aims to make good this lack.

The central claim in Husserl’s later conception of phenomenology is that this new beginning requires an important shift in perspective on the philosopher’s part, which detaches him from his habitual, everyday outlook, that of the ‘natural attitude’. In the natural attitude we unhesitatingly accept the ‘givenness’ of the world around us, and of the many types of objects it contains. We experience ourselves as human subjects in the world, alongside other humans as well as nonhuman animals. As Husserl puts it, ‘[the world] is continually “on hand” for me and I myself am a member of it’ (1982:53). Husserl holds moreover that in the natural attitude we are continuously engaged in acts of ‘positing’ the world and its contents; in

other words, and whether or not we explicitly express beliefs to this effect, we regard the world and the objects within it, as *existing*, or *actual*.

The shift in perspective that Husserl prescribes involves a retreat from these unquestioned existential beliefs: the philosopher *parenthesizes* them, or *puts them out of action*. This operation is reminiscent of Descartes's 'method of doubt', and Husserl repeatedly acknowledges Descartes's inspirational example, but it is not identical. The existential beliefs in question are not doubted, or negated, but rather *suspended*: no use may be made of them. For this exercise, Husserl borrows the Greek term *epochē* (which is used in ancient sceptical discussions to refer to 'suspension of judgement' and, outside philosophy, literally translates as 'check' or 'hindrance').

The *epochē*, according to Husserl, opens up the philosopher's proper domain of enquiry: his own 'pure consciousness', which remains available as an object of study even after all assumptions about the existence of the world and its contents have been bracketed. Like Descartes, Husserl regards the experience of one's own conscious states as indubitable: as Husserl often puts it, such experience provides evidence that is *apodictic*, whose falsity is inconceivable. Although I may doubt whether an experience accurately represents reality, I cannot doubt the experience *as an appearance* or 'phenomenon'.

Husserl often describes the *epochē* as the gateway to a 'new region of being', a region that the natural attitude typically obstructs from view. 'As long as the possibility of the phenomenological attitude had not been recognized,' he writes, 'the phenomenological world had to remain unknown, indeed, hardly even suspected' (1982:66). The task for the philosopher, once he has entered this region, is to describe what he finds there, given in the ongoing stream of his conscious states. (With this undertaking, Husserl's project diverges from Descartes's.) Husserl believes that the systematic investigation of the field of 'pure consciousness' can uncover essential truths about the nature of experience. Thus, as Husserl illustrates, the structure of any experience of a material object can be explicated, as can the experience of another mind. The retreat from the natural attitude allows the philosopher to reconstruct what it is for us to 'have' a world.

Simone de Beauvoir records in her memoirs the tremendous excitement that Sartre's encounter with Husserl's ideas produced in him.

Phenomenology examined our experience of the world, and promised to illuminate it without either naïveté or dogma. Sartre refers to it respectfully in *TE* as ‘a scientific... study of consciousness’, ‘proceeding...via intuition’, which ‘puts us in the presence of *the thing*’ (p. 4). At the time of writing *TE*, Sartre was also working on a first novel—but whose title at that point was ‘A Factum on fictional project that was eventually published as *Nausea*—his Contingency’. Phenomenology could not have been more relevant to Sartre’s central concern, in both his philosophical and his fictional work of the time, with the relationship between consciousness and the world.

Yet, Sartre complains in *TE*, a rigorous use of the phenomenological method does *not* uncover the transcendental I (or ‘pure Ego’, as Husserl more commonly puts it) that Husserl locates at the heart of conscious experience. Sartre accuses Husserl of an unnecessary duplication of selves; the worldly ‘psycho-physical’ self that, Husserl claims, we normally have in mind when we talk of our ‘self’ poses no problem. But, Sartre rhetorically asks, ‘is this psychical and psychophysical me not sufficient?’ (p. 5). Why double it, as Husserl does, with a further, ‘inner’ self, a transcendental I? Moreover, Sartre suggests, Husserl’s own, self-imposed methodological constraint—his *epochē*—ought to *rule out* any such transcendental I.

## *THE EGO AND THE EPOCHĒ: SARTRE’S INTERNAL CRITIQUE*

Husserl does indeed seem to speak of ‘two’ selves, with different names: an empirical or ‘psychological’ self and a ‘pure’ or transcendental Ego. The operation of the *epochē* clarifies the distinction between them. In ordinary life, unreflectively immersed within ‘the natural attitude’, a person may speak unproblematically about her ‘self’ (or those of others). This discourse refers to the *psychological* self, attributed to a human *person*, situated within the world. This worldly self figures of course within our existential beliefs (it provides the subject matter of psychology) and must therefore get bracketed by the *epochē*. After the *epochē*, however, when the philosopher surveys the field of ‘pure consciousness’, Husserl maintains that a pure Ego—the subject of consciousness—is disclosed there. Drawing on a visual metaphor, Husserl suggests that the pure Ego’s presence in every conscious

process is like a 'regard' that traverses it. 'This ray of "regard" changes from one cogito to the next, shooting forth anew with each new cogito... The Ego, however, is something identical' (1982: 132). For Husserl, this pure Ego is encountered 'as a *residuum* after our phenomenological exclusion of the world and of the empirical subjectivity included in it' (p. 133).

This finding, Sartre objects, is inconsistent with Husserl's methodology. The point of the *epochē*, as Sartre understands it, is that it circumscribes a realm of which we can have certain knowledge. (Sartre's reading emphasizes the Cartesian strand in Husserl's thinking, in which the driving force of enquiry is the need to secure 'apodictic' evidence. In doing so, he neglects the numerous passages in Husserl's writing where this concern recedes, or is questioned.) Now, Sartre insists, this certainty can extend only to what is wholly given, or immanent, within the 'moment' of consciousness surveyed in the reflective act. Yet the being of the pure Ego outstrips that of any of its conscious states; Husserl explicitly states that it is identical *throughout* the stream of experience. It is therefore, Sartre argues, just like my psychological Ego (or anyone else's, for that matter) *transcendent*: an 'existent', presented to consciousness. If the *epochē* excludes any transcendent being, then no Ego, pure or psychological, can legitimately be included within a post-*epochē*consciousness.

Husserl's distinction between two sorts of Ego is not supposed to imply that each exists independently of the other. Rather, he holds that the relationship between the pure and the psychological Ego is that the latter is the outcome of a process of constitution. *Self-constitution*: the pure Ego, through a process of 'self-objectification', comes to regard itself as part of the world. Now Sartre wholeheartedly agrees that the worldly self is 'constituted': this doctrine, formulated at this stage of his career in phenomenological terms, survives, overlaid with existentialist vocabulary, in his later insistence that, in the case of human beings, 'existence precedes essence'. But, Sartre insists, constituting consciousness must be regarded as *impersonal*: 'personhood' only enters the scene as the outcome of an 'anonymous' process of constitution. Husserl, Sartre suggests, ought to have stopped at one Ego, the psychological 'worldly' one: there is no other, and, Sartre believes, no other is needed.

## THE TRANSPARENCY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

So speaks Sartre the conscientious phenomenologist, out-doing Husserl in his fidelity to the *epochē*, rejecting the transcendental I as gratuitous and unwarranted. Accompanying him, however, and sporadically interrupting, is a far less sober character, outraged by the very thought of such an I. Were it to exist, Sartre claims, it would be *dangerous*: ‘it would violently separate consciousness from itself, it would divide it, slicing through each consciousness like an opaque blade. The transcendental I is the death of consciousness’ (p. 7).

For Sartre, to allow either substance or opacity within consciousness is to compromise its *absolute* status. From its nature as an ‘absolute’ it follows, in Sartre’s eyes, that ‘[c]onsciousness... cannot be limited except by itself’ (p. 7), or subject to any law but its own. A transcendental I would in effect govern consciousness and, Sartre says with distaste, render it ‘heavy and *ponderable*’ (p. 9). Even to characterize it as the *source* of conscious experience would conflict with a truth about consciousness that, Sartre claims, we ‘know’: ‘nothing except consciousness can be the source of consciousness’ (p. 15).

As Sartre’s language indicates, he regards these claims about consciousness—its spontaneity, translucency, autonomy—as unquestionable. They reappear, often verbatim, in the major work of 1943 in which his early phenomenological writings culminated: *Being and Nothingness*. (By that point, Sartre had clarified what was at stake: the possibility of human freedom.) But are they phenomenologically grounded? As many critics have pointed out, it is doubtful, even in Husserl’s case, whether the framework of his enquiry justifies his attribution of a distinctive, ‘non-natural’ type of being to consciousness. In the case of Sartre, whose adherence to the phenomenological method is less systematic, the doubt is greater still. Why should we assent to his description of consciousness as absolute, spontaneous, self-limiting, and so on? Although Sartre assures us that we *know* these truths, he does not show us *how*. The role of phenomenology appears at this point to be only ancillary: where ‘evidence’ can be found, its function is to persuade the reader of metaphysical convictions that Sartre holds independently and unshakeably. Phenomenology seems to be led by metaphysics, rather than *vice versa*: this tendency, by *Being and Nothingness*, had become more pronounced.

# THE NON-TRANSPARENCY OF REFLECTION

Sartre appeals to the *epochē* to convict Husserl's account of a transcendental I of inconsistency. Yet the account he offers in *TE* of the source of Husserl's mistake raises questions about the validity and possibility of knowledge derived from reflection that threaten the phenomenological method in its entirety. In *TE*, one of Sartre's earliest phenomenological texts, one already finds tensions in Sartre's 'corrective' appropriation of Husserl's method that are never fully resolved.

Having denied Husserl the right to locate an I within consciousness, Sartre sets out to explain the appearances. For he concedes that there *are* experiences in which an 'I' features. In this, Descartes and Husserl were right: 'it is undeniable that the Cogito is personal. In the "I think", there is an I which thinks' (p. 9). Their mistake, however, was to misinterpret this encounter with an I as an encounter with a self that had been there all along. But, Sartre points out, the experience of the Cogito is always *reflective*: consciousness 'discovers' its personal being only when it reflects upon itself. And Sartre's ingenious suggestion is that the 'discovery' of personal being, understood as pre-existing the act of reflection, is an illusion. The reflective attitude, rather than *discovering* the self, *creates* it: 'might it not be precisely the reflective act which brings the me into being in reflected consciousness?' (p. 11).

On Sartre's account, the reflective attitude is far from reliable. Although it is associated with the idea of 'transparency', there is nothing mirror-like about it: it alters the 'data' that it surveys. In *TE* Sartre does not provide an explanation of how this occurs: how can a shift in attitude result in the creation of a new entity? Further, he seems to move between the more radical charge that reflection misleadingly modifies the nature of consciousness and a much weaker complaint, that its findings may be less than certain.

Sartre's early criticisms of reflection express a distrust of it as a means of gaining self-knowledge that recurs throughout his writings, literary as well as philosophical. Sartre's aversion to the 'inner life' goes hand in hand with his sense that the means typically used to apprehend it—introspection—is, at best, unreliable and often dishonest. In fact, as he tells us in his Conclusion, his account of consciousness implies that there is no 'inner life'

(p. 43) and thereby discredits people's attempts to monitor it: 'Doubts, remorse, the so-called "crises of consciousness", etc., in short all of the material of people's diaries become mere *representations*' (p. 43). (Sartre's sarcastic tone here prefigures his cynical description of 'sincerity', in *Being and Nothingness*, as a form of bad faith.) Even in his own *War Diaries* where, as one might expect, Sartre adopts a more positive attitude towards self-scrutiny, his reservations about it are not abandoned. But, he writes in 1939, wartime diary-keeping counts as a special case: 'It simply seems to me that on the occasion of some great event, when one is in the process of changing one's life like a snake sloughing its skin, one can look at that dead skin...and take one's bearings. After the war, I shall no longer keep this diary, or if I do I shall no longer speak about myself in it' (1984:139).

In *TE*, Sartre argues that a distinction needs to be made between 'pure' and 'impure' reflection. Although he does not state this explicitly, the distinction allows one to understand Husserl's 'mistake' as an instance of 'impure' reflection. (And it also provides a basis for scepticism about introspection.) The error that defines impure reflection is that it goes beyond what is 'given' in the 'instantaneous consciousness' (p. 22) reflected upon, it 'affirms more than it knows': it extends its claims to objects that appear 'through' that moment of consciousness, but are not wholly contained within it. The hatred of Peter that I may discern in myself, Sartre suggests, can appear only within the perspective of *impure* reflection, because my state of hatred is understood as outlasting my current encounter with it. 'After all,' Sartre comments, 'I have hated Peter for a long time and I think I always will hate him' (p. 22). Pure reflection, limited to the instant and thereby free of error, would entitle me only to say that 'I feel at this moment a violent revulsion towards Peter' (p. 22). This corrective potential of pure reflection *vis-à-vis* impure reflection echoes Sartre's 'correction' of Husserl in relation to the self.

Does Sartre, then, identify his own method with that of pure reflection? Interestingly, in *TE*, this does not seem to be the case; in fact, as we will see, Sartre says remarkably little about his own methodology. But there are difficulties in the idea of pure reflection that Sartre, in *TE*, does not seem to notice.

One difficulty relates to the concept of the 'instantaneous', on which the distinction between pure and impure reflection turns. For Sartre, the 'instantaneous moment' circumscribes the domain of certainty within the

reflective attitude. But isn't the 'instant', encroached upon on either side by past and future instants, a vanishing point? This difficulty, of course, also threatens Husserl's identification of the domain of 'apodictic' evidence with what is given in the present moment of consciousness. (Ironically, though, Husserl seems to have been more aware of the problem: he devotes an entire section (§9) of the *Cartesian Meditations* to the 'urgent' problem of the *range* of the apodictic evidence of the Cogito.) Sartre's complaint, against Husserl, that the *epochē*, rigorously practised, ought to exclude the I from the domain of certainty invites a question about what results one might expect from Sartre's own, 'purified' method of enquiry. Can pure reflection deliver *any* certain knowledge about consciousness, or will it turn out that any putative object of reflection will exceed its bounds?

Thus Sartre's criticism of Husserl rebounds against his own thinking. This self-ensnaring structure has of course become familiar more recently through the late-twentieth-century 'deconstructive' writings of Jacques Derrida, whose early philosophical engagement with phenomenology compares fascinatingly with Sartre's. Both Sartre and Derrida, early in their philosophical careers, take on the hugely influential figure of Husserl, and both challenge his thinking by means of internal critique. Indeed, the doctrine of the pure Ego attracts both their attention: amusingly, one of Sylvie le Bon's notes (reproduced here) to the 1965 publication, by Vrin, of *TE* in book form, draws the reader's attention to a journal article published in 1963 by a little-known philosopher, 'M. Derrida', where Husserl's account of the transcendental I is further discussed (p. 58, note 26).

A second difficulty arises from Sartre's conception of consciousness (noted earlier) as 'absolute', and free of opacity. We saw that this conception, for Sartre, is incompatible with the 'substantiality' of a transcendental I, and that this thought played a part in Sartre's opposition to the latter. Sartre also insists that the translucency of consciousness is incompatible with the existence of division within it (and this thought underlies his rejection of Freud). But the difficulty for pure reflection is that it seems *also*, unavoidably, to introduce a division within consciousness insofar as its structure makes of consciousness an *object* to itself.

Sartre describes, in *TE*, the 'alteration' that reflection brings about in consciousness: prior to reflection, consciousness always involves 'consciousness of itself', but *non-positionally* (p. 10). With reflection, consciousness *becomes* positional, by virtue of the fact that it directs itself



towards itself. But this ‘self-positing’ installs a division between the ‘reflective’ and ‘reflected’ aspects of consciousness. As Sartre puts it: ‘the consciousness which says “I think” is precisely not the consciousness that thinks. Or rather, it is not its *own* thought that it posits by thisthetic act’ (p. 10). At this point in the text, he is explaining how, by virtue of this dislocation from itself, reflective consciousness can, as it were, ‘accrue’ an I that it would be false to attribute to unreflected consciousness. But the trouble is that reflection in *general* requires an act of ‘positing’, so the dislocation must affect pure reflection too. The problem, then, seems not so much to be one of whether the thinker ‘affirms more than he knows’ but whether there is anything that he *can* ‘know’ about himself. It appears to be impossible to *spell out* the ‘consciousness of itself’ that Sartre attributes to pre-reflective consciousness—to transform it into self-knowledge—without destroying it.

We will never know how far Sartre appreciated these difficulties when he wrote *TE*, but they persist in his later writings. Sartre struggles at several points in *Being and Nothingness* with the topic of self-knowledge. Famously, while he had no difficulty in characterizing the ‘bad faith’ inherent in everyday self-understanding, he was obliged to postpone any account of *good* faith, claiming in a much-quoted footnote that its description ‘has no place here’ (2003:70).

## *PHENOMENOLOGY WITHOUT REFLECTION?*

It is remarkable that, alongside the account of pure reflection that Sartre outlines in *TE*, a quite different methodology altogether is briefly described, and employed. For Sartre does not merely claim that the I is a product of reflective consciousness. Audaciously, he tries in addition to demonstrate its *absence* from *unreflective* consciousness. But how can he do this, without recourse to reflection? Sartre, simply, attempts to *show* how. Through memory, he suggests, an experience may be subtly retrieved without being ‘posited’ or otherwise disturbed. ‘All that is required...is to try and reconstitute the complete moment in which this unreflected consciousness appeared’, Sartre tells us, and adds, in a reassuring parenthesis, that ‘this is, by definition, always possible’ (p. 11). The key to success in this operation is that one must reconstitute the moment that has just passed *without*

*altering the direction of one's gaze.* Applying this subtle technique to the example of reading a book, Sartre learns that 'while I was reading, there was a consciousness of the book, of the heroes...but the I did not inhabit this consciousness' (p. 12).

The tension in this endeavour is clear. Perhaps *spontaneous* memories, unsolicited, demonstrate that there are occasions in everyday life when we 'relive' earlier experiences, just as they were. But can the same constancy in point of view be claimed for an experience that is deliberately retrieved (for the purpose, in this case, of a philosophical demonstration)? Does not the distinction, implicit in Sartre's description of the process, between the 'reconstituting' consciousness and the 'reconstituted' state cast fatal doubt on his claim to have steered clear of reflection?

Sartre acknowledges that the 'result' he has secured by these means is, insofar as it depends on memory, fallible. It lacks the certainty of phenomenological reflection. But—the lesson of the I shows—the danger with the latter is that illegitimate claims to that 'certainty' can all too easily arise. In *TE*, Sartre moves between different phenomenological methodologies without committing himself exclusively to just one. The influence of Heidegger (whose enormous differences with Husserl we cannot go into here) makes itself felt alongside Husserl's, as if they were compatible. (This syncretic attitude, already present in Sartre's earliest philosophical publications, is a hallmark of his intellectual personality throughout his career.) Despite the frequent methodological discussions in Sartre's 'phenomenological' writings of the 1930s, the conception of phenomenology he wishes to endorse in this period is unstable and never fully defined. But the early doubts about Husserl, expressed in *TE*, seem to have grown: by *Being and Nothingness*, interestingly, the *epochē* has dropped out of the picture completely.

## *THE CONSTITUTION OF THE EGO*

Having ruled out the possibility of locating an I within consciousness, Sartre undertakes, in the second part of *TE*, to give an account of how the Ego he does admit—a 'transcendent' Ego, 'outside, *in the world*' (p. 1)—is constituted. As this Ego, we have seen, only appears with the reflective attitude, the constitutive processes Sartre describes are also located at the

level of reflection. This might suggest that Sartre's standpoint is second-order (pure?) reflection, but Sartre does not clarify this.

Sartre claims that transcendent entities of three different types enter into the constitution of the Ego: states, qualities and actions. He explains in the following three sections how each of these is constituted in relation to consciousness, and suggests that the role of the Ego is to unify them. The Ego is a 'transcendent pole of synthetic unity', to which these psychological entities are related (p. 21). Sartre's use of such phrases, and his taxonomic procedure, appear conventionally phenomenological. Nothing prepares the reader for Sartre's statement, at the end of his discussion of states, that the link between a state like hatred and the experience in which it appears is *magical*. Moreover, he adds, 'it is in exclusively magical terms that we have to describe the relations between the me and consciousness' (p. 26).

These relations are 'magical' because ordinary causal thinking cannot accommodate them. Sartre emphasizes repeatedly, in the second part of *TE*, the 'unintelligibility' of our conception of the Ego, which arises, he suggests, from an incompatibility in its elements. Simply put, Sartre's point is that the nature of subjectivity cannot be captured within a conceptual framework suitable for worldly objects. And an important part of his reason for thinking this is that consciousness has a unique and distinctive type of being. Objects that enter into causal relations reciprocally limit and define each other: their being is inert and *relative*, Sartre holds, while that of consciousness is absolute and spontaneous. The Ego (and its component parts) are supposed to explain our experience. We invoke a 'state' such as hatred to explain, in causal terms, an episode of behaviour: 'Why were you so unpleasant to Peter?' '*Because* I detest him.' (p. 25). Yet at the same time (pure) reflection leaves us certain of the spontaneity of consciousness, and thereby invalidates the explanatory hypothesis: conscious episodes of 'disgust' cannot be the *effect* of hatred. Hence the need for 'magic' in our self-understanding. In place of an inapplicable causal understanding of the relation between a state and an episode of consciousness, we rely, Sartre says, on the illogical concept of 'emanation': the episode of disgust is not an effect of hatred, but its emanation.

'Emanation' (*émanation* in French), belongs in both languages to Christian theological vocabulary, specifically to an element in the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Both Son and Holy Spirit are said to 'proceed' from God the Father by way of emanation. If this were the only item of religious

vocabulary in *TE*, one might think its appearance accidental. In fact Sartre draws, without inhibition or comment, on a wide range of theological notions: the Ego creates itself *ex nihilo* (p. 32), relates to its states by a kind of *procession* (p. 33), and maintains its qualities by ‘a veritable continuous creation’ (p. 32).

Sartre’s use of this religious vocabulary, in addition to his frequent references to magic and witchcraft in the second part of *TE*, raises fascinating interpretative questions. What status does Sartre, an atheist, accord to these theological concepts? What role can phenomenology, understood as a ‘scientific study of consciousness’, find for magic in the constitution of an intelligible world? The reader of *TE*, leaving behind the confined Husserlian parameters of part one, is largely expected to decide these questions for herself.

Various possibilities suggest themselves. In moving freely between magic and theology, Sartre may provocatively be suggesting that the two sets of concepts are on a par: religion belongs alongside other ‘superstitious’ thought. In showing both the centrality and the apparent indispensability of these concepts in modern western thinking, Sartre may be taking issue with an anthropological account of ‘pre-rational’ mentality, popular at the time, that associated such modes of thinking with primitive societies. And, following Henri Bergson (1859–1941), (whose influence on *TE* extends beyond the occasional passages in which Sartre disagrees with him), Sartre may be seeking to demonstrate the existence of ‘magical’ elements in our self-understanding that an unprejudiced phenomenology must bring to light.

But is this self-understanding necessary, and if not, should we correct it? In offering a metaphysical diagnosis of the source of unintelligibility—the ineliminable misfit between causal thinking and the ‘absolute’ nature of consciousness—Sartre suggests that we have no alternative to magical, non-logical concepts. ‘[M]an is always a sorcerer for man’ (p. 35), Sartre writes, and he remains committed to this claim two years later, when exactly the same phrase appears in his *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions* (2002:56). Nonetheless, Sartre’s use of terms like ‘degeneration’, and ‘degradation’ to describe the transformation that consciousness undergoes when it becomes an object of reflection cannot but communicate a sense of regret at this process, and it is not ultimately clear in *TE* whether it is merely our intellectual limitations or, worse, our culpability that prompts this regret. Culpability is at least a possible interpretation at some points in

the text, for example in relation to Sartre's claim that consciousness 'imprisons itself in the World in order to flee from itself' (p. 34).

## *PHENOMENOLOGY EXISTENTIALIZED*

Sartre's conclusion summarizes in three 'remarks' the achievements of his essay. Within these, he includes his alleged solutions to two long-standing philosophical problems that have defeated generations of philosophers, Husserl included: the so-called 'problem of other minds', and the threat of solipsism. Sartre believes that his account of the Ego's transcendence escapes these problems but, as one might expect—and as he had already come to see by the time he wrote *Being and Nothingness*—the 'solutions' he proposes are short-lived: at most they displace, but do not eliminate, the traditional problems.

A richer suggestion, advanced in the course of Sartre's first remark, is that his account of the relationship between consciousness and the I explains, better than Husserl's can, how the *epochē* might be motivated. For Sartre, an appeal to reason here is wholly unconvincing. Why, he asks, should we ever come to question the 'natural attitude', given that it is not internally incoherent? Sartre's suggestion, anticipating once again his later account of bad faith, is that the natural attitude and the Ego that we constitute within it play a *practical* role: they 'mask from consciousness its own spontaneity' (p. 48). We immerse ourselves in the natural attitude in order to avoid the anguish that recognition of the spontaneity of consciousness would induce. (Sartre claims, too, that this metaphysically-based anguish lies, contrary to psychoanalytical explanation, at the origin of various psychological disorders.) But this escapist endeavour is not wholly successful: inevitably moments arise in which we find ourselves confronted with the reality. The *epochē*, then, is not driven by reason, but by the experience of anguish: 'no longer an intellectual method...[i]t is an anguish that imposes itself on us and that we cannot avoid' (p. 49). In Sartre's hands, the importance of phenomenology is not merely epistemological; its findings affect the way we live our lives. This existentialist perspective, seen in *TE* at an early stage of its development, provides of course Sartre's most distinctive and creative contribution to phenomenological thinking.

Sartre's final remark considers the political and ethical implications of his position. Even at this early stage of his career, before the extensive

politicization that the second World War brought about in him, Sartre is concerned to defend phenomenology against the ‘theoreticians of the extreme left’ who construe it as an idealist philosophy. Sartre argues that by situating the self within the world, his account gives due weight to the ‘external resistances’ of ‘suffering, hunger and war’ (pp. 50–1), and vindicates a materialist outlook. Sartre is not deterred by the glaring incompatibility at the level of metaphysics between his account of consciousness and materialism, because, he tells us, ‘I have always thought that such a fertile working hypothesis as historical materialism in no way required as a basis the absurdity of metaphysical materialism’ (p. 51).

Sartre’s triumphant claim that, once the transcendence of the Ego is admitted, ‘[n]othing further is needed’ (p. 52) to provide politics and ethics with the right metaphysical foundation is questionable; his later writings, at any rate, show that these issues had not been laid to rest. But Sartre’s tendency to exaggerate should not lead us to overlook an indisputable achievement of this elegant text: its imaginative exploration of the significance and wide-ranging ramifications of a seemingly theoretical and inconsequential doctrine in Husserl’s thought.

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# THE TRANSCENDENCE OF THE EGO

## A sketch for a phenomenological description

For most philosophers, the Ego is an ‘inhabitant’ of consciousness. Some of them state that it is formally present at the heart of ‘Erlebnisse’, as an empty principle of unification. Others—psychologists, for the most part—claim they can discover its material presence, as a centre of desires and acts, in every moment of our psychical life. I should like to show here that the Ego is neither formally nor materially *in* consciousness: it is outside, *in the world*; it is a being in the world, like the Ego of another.

I.

### *THE I AND THE ME*

(A)

#### **The theory of the formal presence of the I**

We have to agree with Kant when he says that ‘it *must be possible* for the “I think” to accompany all my representations’.<sup>1</sup> But should we thereby conclude that an I inhabits *de facto* all our states of consciousness and really performs the supreme synthesis of our experience? It seems that this would be to distort Kant’s philosophy. The problem of critique is a *de jure* problem: thus Kant affirms nothing about the *de facto* existence of the ‘I think’. He seems, on the contrary, to have clearly seen that there were moments of consciousness without an I, since he says: ‘it *must be possible* (for the “I think” to accompany, etc.)’. The real issue is rather that of determining the conditions of possibility of experience. One of these conditions is that I should always be able to consider my perception or my

thought as *mine*; that is all. But there is a dangerous tendency in contemporary philosophy—traces of which may be found in neo-Kantianism, empirio-criticism, or an intellectualism such as that of Brochard—which consists of turning the conditions of possibility determined by critique into a *reality*.<sup>2</sup> This is a tendency that leads some authors, for instance, to wonder what ‘transcendental consciousness’ may actually *be*. If we formulate the question in these terms, we are naturally forced to conceive of this consciousness—which constitutes our empirical consciousness—as an unconscious. But Boutroux, in his lectures on Kant’s philosophy,<sup>3</sup> had already refuted these interpretations. Kant never bothered about the way in which empirical consciousness is *de facto* constituted, he never deduced it, as in some Neo-platonic procession, from a higher consciousness, a constitutive hyperconsciousness. Transcendental consciousness is, for him, merely the set of conditions necessary for the existence of an empirical consciousness. In consequence, to make the transcendental *I* into a *real entity*, to turn it into the inseparable companion of each of our ‘consciousnesses’,<sup>a</sup> is to make a *de facto* and not a *de jure* judgement, and means that we adopt a point of view that is radically different from Kant’s. And if we then persist in claiming that this move can be authorized by Kant’s considerations on the unity necessary for experience, we commit the same error as those who turn transcendental consciousness into a pre-empirical unconscious.

If we thus agree with Kant on the *de jure* question, the *de facto* question is not thereby resolved. So it should here be stated in clear and concise terms: it must be possible for the ‘I think’ to accompany all our representations, but does it accompany them in actual fact? Let us suppose, furthermore, that a certain representation *A* passes from a certain state in which the ‘I think’ does not accompany it to a state in which the ‘I think’ does accompany it; will this representation thereby undergo a modification of structure, or will it remain basically unchanged? This second question leads us to ask a third: it must be possible for the ‘I think’ to accompany all our representations; but are we to understand by this that the unity of our representations is, directly or indirectly, made a reality by the ‘I think’—or are we to understand that the representations of a consciousness must be unified and articulated in such a way that an ‘I think’ can always be uttered in regard to them? This third question seems to belong to the *de jure* domain and, in this domain, to leave behind Kantian orthodoxy. But what



we really have here is a de facto question which can be formulated in these terms: is the *I* which we encounter in our consciousness made possible by the synthetic unity of our representations, or is it the *I* that in fact unifies the representations among themselves?

If we abandon all the more or less forced interpretations that post-Kantians have given of the ‘I think’, and yet still wish to resolve the problem of the de facto existence of the *I* in consciousness, we encounter, en route, the phenomenology of Husserl.<sup>4</sup> Phenomenology is a scientific, and not a ‘critical’, study of consciousness.<sup>5</sup> Its essential way of proceeding is via intuition. Intuition, according to Husserl, puts us in the presence of *the thing*.<sup>6</sup> We must therefore recognize that phenomenology is a de facto science, and that the problems it raises are de facto problems<sup>b</sup>—and this is something that can also be seen from the way that Husserl calls it a *descriptive* science.<sup>7</sup> The problems of the relations between the *I* and consciousness are thus existential problems. Husserl takes up Kant’s transcendental consciousness and grasps it by means of the *epochē*.<sup>8</sup> But this consciousness is no longer a set of logical conditions, but an absolute fact. It is no longer a *de jure* hypostasis, an unconscious that floats between real and ideal realms. It is a real consciousness, accessible to each and every one of us, once we have performed the ‘reduction’. The fact remains that it is indeed this transcendental consciousness that constitutes our empirical consciousness, consciousness ‘in the world’, consciousness with a psychical and psychophysical *me*. As far as I am concerned, I am quite happy to believe in the existence of a constitutive consciousness. I can go along with Husserl in each of the admirable descriptions<sup>9</sup> in which he shows transcendental consciousness constituting the world by imprisoning itself in empirical consciousness; I am convinced, as he is, that our psychical and psychophysical *me* is a transcendent object which must come under the scope of the *epochē*.<sup>10</sup> But the question I would like to raise is the following: is this psychical and psycho-physical *me* not sufficient? Do we need to add to it a transcendental *I*, as a structure of absolute consciousness?<sup>11</sup> The consequences of the answer we give are easy to see. If the answer is in the negative, then:

1. the transcendental field becomes impersonal, or, if you prefer, ‘pre-personal’, it is *without an I*;

2. the I appears only on the level of humanity and is merely one face of the *me*, the active face;<sup>12</sup>
3. the 'I think' can accompany our representations because it appears against the background of a unity that it has not contributed to creating, and it is this pre-existing unity which, on the contrary, makes it possible;
4. it becomes possible to ask oneself whether personality (even the abstract personality of an *I*) is a necessary accompaniment to consciousness, and whether one cannot conceive of consciousnesses that are absolutely impersonal.<sup>13</sup>

But Husserl has already replied to the question. Having considered that the *Me* was a synthetic and transcendental production of consciousness (in the *Logische Untersuchungen*),<sup>14</sup> he reverted, in the *Ideas*,<sup>15</sup> to the classical thesis of a transcendental I that follows on, so to speak, behind each consciousness, as the necessary structure of these consciousnesses, whose rays (*Ichstrahl*) fall on to each phenomenon that presents itself to the field of attention. Thus transcendental consciousness becomes rigorously personal. Was this conception necessary? Is it compatible with the definition that Husserl gives of consciousness?

It is usually believed that the existence of a transcendental I is justified by the need for consciousness to have unity and individuality. It is because all my perceptions and all my thoughts are linked to this permanent centre that my consciousness is unified; it is because I can say *my* consciousness, and that Peter and Paul can also speak of *their* consciousness, that these consciousnesses can be distinguished from one another. The I is a producer of inwardness. But it is certainly the case that phenomenology does not need to resort to this unifying and individualizing I. Rather, consciousness is defined by intentionality.<sup>16</sup> Through intentionality it transcends itself, it unifies itself by going outside itself.<sup>17</sup> The unity of the thousand active consciousnesses through which I have added, now add, and will add in the future, two and two to make four, is the transcendent object 'two and two make four'. Without the permanence of this eternal truth, it would be impossible to conceive of a real unity, and there would be a multiplicity of irreducible operations—just as many as there are consciousnesses performing the operation. It is possible that those people who think that '2 and 2 make 4' is the *content* of my representation may be forced to resort to

a transcendental and subjective principle of unification—in other words, the I. But it is precisely this of which Husserl has no need. The object is transcendent to the consciousnesses that grasp it, and it is within the object that their unity is found. It will be objected that it is necessary for there to be some principle of unity *in duration* if the continual stream of consciousnesses is able to posit transcendent objects outside itself. Consciousnesses must be perpetual syntheses of past consciousnesses with the present consciousness. And this is perfectly true. But it is typical of Husserl—who studied this subjective unification of consciousnesses in *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*—that he *never resorted* to any synthetic power of the I. It is consciousness that unifies itself, concretely, by an interplay of ‘transversal’ consciousnesses that are real, concrete retentions of past consciousnesses. In this way, consciousness continually refers back to itself: to speak of ‘a consciousness’ is to speak of the whole of consciousness, and this singular property belongs to consciousness itself, whatever its relations with the I may in other respects be.<sup>18</sup> In the *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl seems to have kept intact this conception of consciousness unifying itself in time.<sup>19</sup> From another angle, the individuality of consciousness evidently stems from the nature of consciousness. Consciousness (like Spinoza’s substance)<sup>20</sup> cannot be limited except by itself. It therefore constitutes a synthetic, individual totality, completely isolated from other totalities of the same kind, and the I can, clearly, be merely an *expression* (and not a condition) of this incommunicability and this inwardness of consciousnesses. We can thus unhesitatingly reply: the phenomenological conception of consciousness renders the unifying and individualizing role of the I completely useless. It is, on the contrary, consciousness that renders the unity and personality of my I possible. The transcendental I thus has no *raison d’être*.

Indeed, this superfluous I is actually a hindrance. If it existed, it would violently separate consciousness from itself, it would divide it, slicing through each consciousness like an opaque blade. The transcendental I is the death of consciousness. The existence of consciousness, indeed, is an absolute, because consciousness is conscious of itself; in other words, the type of existence that consciousness has is that it is consciousness of itself.<sup>21</sup> And it becomes conscious of itself *insofar as it is consciousness of a transcendent object*.<sup>22</sup> Everything in consciousness is thus clear and lucid: the object lies opposite it, in its characteristic opacity, but consciousness,

for its part, is purely and simply the consciousness of being consciousness of this object: such is the law of its existence.

We need to add that this consciousness of consciousness—with the exception of cases of reflective consciousness, which I will be examining in detail later—is not *positional*, i.e. consciousness is not its own object.<sup>23</sup> Its object is outside itself by nature, and this is the reason why, in one and the same act, consciousness can *posit* and *grasp* its object. Consciousness as such knows itself only as absolute inwardness. I will call such a consciousness ‘first order’ or ‘*unreflective*’ consciousness. My question is this: is there any room for an I in a consciousness of this kind? The reply is clear: of course not. This I, after all, is neither the object (since it is *ex hypothesi* inward), nor is it an ‘I’ of *consciousness*, since it is something *for* consciousness, not a translucent quality of consciousness, but, to some degree, an inhabitant of it. Indeed, the *I*, with its personality, is—however formal and abstract one may suppose it to be—a centre of opacity, as it were. It bears to the concrete and psycho-physical me the same relation as does a point to three dimensions: it is an infinitely contracted *me*. So if we introduce this opacity into consciousness, we will thereby destroy the highly productive definition we gave of it a little earlier: we will freeze and darken it, so that it is no longer something spontaneous, but bears within itself the germ of opacity. Yet another result would be that we are constrained to abandon the original, profound point of view which makes of consciousness a non-*substantial* absolute. A pure consciousness is an absolute quite simply because it is consciousness of itself. It thus remains a ‘phenomenon’ in the highly particular sense in which ‘to be’ and ‘to appear’ are one and the same.<sup>24</sup> It is nothing but lightness and translucency. It is in this respect that Husserl’s Cogito is so different from the Cartesian Cogito. But if the *I* is a necessary structure of consciousness, this opaque I is thereby elevated to the status of an absolute. We would then be in the presence of a monad. And this indeed, unfortunately, is the way Husserl’s thought has recently been developing (see the *Cartesian Meditations*).<sup>25</sup> Consciousness has become heavier, and lost the character that made it into the absolute existent *by virtue of the fact that it did not exist*. It is now heavy and *ponderable*. All the results of phenomenology are in danger of crumbling away if the I is not, every bit as much as the world, a relative existent, i.e. an object *for* consciousness.<sup>26</sup>

**(B)**

### **The Cogito as reflective consciousness**

The Kantian 'I think' is a condition of possibility. The Cogito of Descartes and Husserl is a *de facto* statement. The Cogito has been described as having a *de facto* necessity, and this expression strikes me as perfectly accurate. Now, it is undeniable that the Cogito is personal. In the 'I think', there is an I which thinks. We here reach the I in its purity and it is indeed from the Cogito that an 'Egology' must begin. And so, the fact that can be taken as the starting point is this: each time that we grasp our thought, either by an immediate intuition, or by an intuition based on memory, we grasp an I which is the I of the thought that is being grasped and which, furthermore, gives itself as transcending this thought and all other possible thoughts. If, for instance, I wish to remember a certain landscape I saw from the train, yesterday, it is possible to bring back the memory of that landscape as such, but I can also remember that I saw that landscape. This is what Husserl calls, in *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, the possibility of *reflecting in memory*.<sup>27</sup> In other words, I can always perform any kind of act of remembering in the personal mode, and the I immediately appears. This is the *de facto* guarantee of the *de jure* affirmation in Kant. It thus appears that there is not a single one of my consciousnesses that I do not grasp as endowed with an I.

But we must remember that all authors who have described the Cogito have presented it as a reflective operation, i.e. a second-order operation. This Cogito is performed by a consciousness *directed towards consciousness*, which takes consciousness as its object. Let us be clear: the certainty of the Cogito is absolute since, as Husserl says,<sup>28</sup> there is an indissoluble unity between the reflecting consciousness and the reflected consciousness (so much so that the reflecting consciousness cannot exist without reflected consciousness). The fact remains that we are in the presence of a synthesis of two consciousnesses, one of which is consciousness *of* the other. Thus the essential principle of phenomenology, 'all consciousness is consciousness *of* something', is maintained. Now, my reflecting consciousness does not take itself for object when I carry out the Cogito. What it affirms concerns the reflected consciousness. Insofar as my reflecting consciousness is consciousness of itself, it is a *non-positional* consciousness. It becomes positional only if directed at the reflected

consciousness which, in itself, was not a positional consciousness of itself before it was reflected. Thus the consciousness that says 'I think' is precisely not the consciousness that thinks. Or rather, it is not *its own* thought that it posits by thisthetic act. We are thus justified in raising the question whether the I that thinks is common to the two superimposed consciousnesses, or whether it is not rather the I of the reflected consciousness. In fact, all reflecting consciousness is in itself unreflected, and a new, third-order act is needed to posit it. Moreover, there is no infinite regress here, since a consciousness has no need of a reflecting consciousness in order to be conscious of itself. It merely does not posit itself to itself as its own object.<sup>29</sup>

But might it not be precisely the reflective act that brings the *me* into being in reflected consciousness? This would explain how all thinking grasped by intuition possesses an I, without running into the difficulties that my preceding chapter pointed out. Husserl<sup>30</sup> is the first to recognize that an unreflected thought undergoes a radical modification when it becomes reflected. But does this modification have to be limited to a loss of 'naïveté'? Might not the essential aspect of the change be the fact that the I appears? Obviously, we need to resort to concrete experience, and this may seem impossible, since an experience of this kind is by definition reflective, in other words endowed with an I. But all unreflected consciousness, being a non-thetic consciousness of itself, leaves behind it a non-thetic memory that can be consulted.<sup>31</sup> All that is required for this is to try to reconstitute the complete moment in which this unreflected consciousness appeared (and this is, by definition, always possible). For instance, I was just now absorbed in my reading. I am now going to try to remember the circumstances of my reading, my attitude, the lines I was reading. I am thus going to bring back to life not merely those external details but a certain thickness of unreflected consciousness, since it is only *by* this consciousness that the objects have been perceived, and they remain relative to it. This consciousness is not to be posited as an object of my reflection: quite the opposite, I must direct my attention to the objects I have brought back to life, but *without losing sight of this consciousness*; I must maintain a sort of complicity with it, and draw up an inventory of its content in a non-positional way. The result is not in doubt: while I was reading, there was a consciousness *of* the book, *of* the heroes of the book, but the I did not inhabit this consciousness, it was merely consciousness of



the object and non-positional consciousness of itself. I can turn these results, grasped athetically, into the object of a thesis and declare: there was no I in the unreflected consciousness. This operation should not be considered artificial, dreamt up for the mere needs of this particular case: it is evidently thanks to this operation that Titchener<sup>32</sup> was able to state, in his *Textbook of Psychology*, that quite often the *me* was absent from his consciousness. But he did not take this any further, and did not attempt to classify the states of consciousness in which there is no *me*.

The reader will doubtless be tempted to object that this operation, this non-reflective grasp of a consciousness by another consciousness, can obviously be performed only in and by memory, and that it thus does not benefit from the absolute certainty inherent in the reflective act. We would thus find ourselves *on the one hand* in the presence of an act that is certain and sure, enabling me to affirm the presence of the I in reflected consciousness, and *on the other hand* in the presence of a dubious memory which would tend to insinuate that the I is absent from unreflected consciousness. It seems that we have no right to set the latter up in opposition to the former. But I would ask you to consider that the memory of unreflected consciousness is not opposed to the data of reflective consciousness. No one dreams of denying that the I appears in a reflected consciousness. We simply need to contrast the reflective memory of my reading ('I was reading'), which is in itself rather dubious in nature, with a non-reflected memory. The rights of present reflection do not, in fact, extend beyond consciousness grasped in the present moment. And reflective memory, to which we are obliged to resort in order to restore the consciousnesses that have elapsed, not only has a dubious character due to its nature as a memory: it also remains suspect because, on Husserl's own admission, reflection *modifies* spontaneous consciousness. And thus, since all the non-reflective memories of unreflected consciousness show me a consciousness *without me*, and since on the other hand theoretical considerations based recognize that the I could not be part of the internal structure on consciousness's intuition of essence have obliged us to of *Erlebnisse*, we are forced to conclude: there is no I on the unreflected level.

When I run after a tram, when I look at the time, when I become absorbed in the contemplation of a portrait, there is no I. There is a consciousness of the *tram-needing- to-be-caught*, etc., and a non-positional consciousness of consciousness. In fact, I am then plunged into the world of

objects, it is they which constitute the unity of my consciousnesses, which present themselves with values, attractive and repulsive values, but as for *me*, I have disappeared, I have annihilated myself. There is no place for *me* at this level, and this is not the result of some chance, some momentary failure of attention: it stems from the very structure of consciousness.

This is something that a description of the Cogito will make even clearer. Can one say that the reflective act grasps, to the same degree and in the same way, the *I* on the one hand and thinking consciousness on the other? Husserl insists on the fact that the certainty of the reflective act stems from the way that in it, consciousness is grasped without facets, without profile, as a totality (without *Abschattungen*).<sup>33</sup> So much is evident. On the contrary, the spatio-temporal object always yields itself via an infinity of aspects and it is basically nothing other than the ideal unity of this infinity. As for the meanings, the eternal truths, they affirm their transcendence by giving themselves, from the moment they appear, as independent of time, whereas the consciousness that grasps them is, on the contrary, rigorously individualized in duration. My question is this: when a reflective consciousness grasps the ‘I think’, is what it is grasping a full, concrete consciousness grasped in a real moment of concrete duration? The answer is clear: the *I* is not given as a concrete moment,<sup>34</sup> a perishable structure of my present consciousness; on the contrary, it affirms its permanence beyond that consciousness and all consciousnesses and—even though, to be sure, it is hardly similar to a mathematical truth—its type of existence is much closer to that of eternal truths than to that of consciousness. It is even evident that the reason why Descartes moved from the Cogito to the idea of thinking substance is that he believed that *I* and ‘think’ are on the same level. We saw just now that Husserl, albeit more subtly, can basically be charged with making the same error. Of course, I acknowledge that he grants to the *I* a special transcendence which is not that of the object and which could be called a transcendence ‘from above’. But what right does he have to do this? And how are we to explain this privileged treatment of the *I* if it is not by metaphysical or critical preoccupations that have nothing to do with phenomenology? Let us be more radical and affirm quite fearlessly that *all transcendence* must fall under the scope of the *epochē*;<sup>35</sup> this will perhaps mean we avoid writing such muddled chapters as section 61 of the *Ideas*. The *I* affirms itself as transcendent in the ‘I think’, and this is because it is not of the same nature as transcendental consciousness.



We should note, further, that the I does not appear to reflection as the reflected consciousness: it gives itself *through* reflected consciousness. To be sure, it is grasped by intuition and is the object of evidential certainty. But Husserl has rendered philosophy a signal service by distinguishing between different kinds of certainty.<sup>36</sup> Well, it is all too certain that the *I* of the 'I think' is the object of neither an apodictic nor an adequate evidential certainty. It is not apodictic because in saying *I*, we affirm much more than we know. It is not adequate because the I presents itself as an opaque reality whose content would need to be unfolded. Of course, it manifests itself as the source of consciousness but this in itself ought to make us reflect; indeed, by this very fact it appears as if veiled, indistinct through consciousness, like a pebble at the bottom of the water—and by this fact, too, it is immediately deceptive, since we know that nothing except consciousness can be the source of consciousness. Furthermore, if the I is part of consciousness, there will then be two I's: the I of reflective consciousness and the I of reflected consciousness. Fink,<sup>37</sup> Husserl's disciple, even knows of a third I, the I of transcendental consciousness, liberated by the *epochē*. Hence the problem of the three I's, whose difficulties he rather blandly mentions. For us, this problem is quite simply insoluble, since it is unacceptable for any communication to be established between the reflective I and the reflected I, if they are real elements of consciousness; nor, in particular, is it acceptable for them to achieve a final identity in a single I.

To conclude this analysis, it seems to *me* that we can make the following statements:

1. The I is an *existent*. It has a type of concrete existence, doubtless different from that of mathematical truths, meanings, or spatio-temporal beings, but just as real. It gives itself as transcendent.
2. The I yields itself to a special kind of intuition which grasps it behind reflected consciousness, in a way that is always inadequate.
3. The I only ever appears on the occasion of a reflective act. In this case, the complex structure of consciousness is as follows: there is an unreflected act of reflection without I which is aimed at a reflected consciousness. This reflected consciousness becomes the object of the reflecting consciousness, without, however, ceasing to affirm its own object (a chair, a mathematical truth, etc). At the same time a new object appears which is the occasion for an affirmation of the reflective

consciousness and is in consequence neither on the same level as unreflected consciousness (because the latter is an absolute that has no need of reflective consciousness in order to exist), nor on the same level as the object of the unreflected consciousness (chair, etc.).

This transcendent object of the reflective act is the I.

4. The transcendent I must fall under the phenomenological reduction. The Cogito affirms too much. The sure and certain content of the pseudo-‘cogito’ is not ‘I am conscious of this chair’, but ‘*there is* consciousness of this chair’. This content is sufficient to constitute an infinite and absolute field for the investigations of phenomenology.

## (C)

### **The theory of the material presence of the *me***

For Kant and for Husserl, the I is a formal structure of consciousness. I have tried to show that an I is never purely formal, that it is always, even when conceived in the abstract, an infinite contraction of the material *me*. But we must, before we go any further, rid ourselves of a purely psychological theory that affirms, for psychological reasons, the material presence of the me in all our consciousnesses. This is the theory of *amour-propre* put forward by the French moralists. In their view, the love of self—and consequently the *me*—is hidden in all feelings, in a thousand different disguises. In a very general way, the *me*, by virtue of this love that it bears to itself, is seen as desiring *for itself* all the objects that it desires. The essential structure of each of my acts would then be a *reference to myself*. The ‘return to me myself’ would be constitutive of all consciousness.

To object to this thesis that this return to me myself is in no way present to consciousness—for example when I am thirsty, and see a glass of water that appears desirable to me—is no real problem for it; it would willingly grant us as much. La Rochefoucauld is one of the first to have made use of the unconscious without naming it: for him, *amour-propre conceals* itself in the most diverse disguises. We have to track it down before we can grasp it.<sup>38</sup> More generally, it was subsequently admitted that the *me*, while it may not be present to consciousness, is hidden behind it, and is the pole of attraction of all our representations and of all our desires. The *me* thus seeks to procure the object for itself so as to satisfy its desire. In other words, it is desire (or, if you prefer, the desiring *me*) which is given as an end and the desired object that is the means.

Now, the interest of this thesis seems to me to reside in the way it brings out an error very frequently committed by psychologists—an error consisting in confusing the essential structure of reflective acts with that of unreflected acts.<sup>39</sup> One thereby overlooks the fact that there are always two forms of possible existence for a consciousness; and, each time that the observed consciousnesses are given as unreflected, a reflective structure is superimposed on them—a structure that is thoughtlessly claimed to be unconscious.

I feel pity for Peter and I come to his aid. For my consciousness, one thing alone exists at that moment: Peter-having-to-be-aided. This quality of ‘having-to-be-aided’ is to be found in Peter. It acts on me like a force. Aristotle had already said as much: it is the desirable that moves the desirer. At this level, desire<sup>40</sup> is given to consciousness as centrifugal (it transcends itself, it is the thetic consciousness of ‘having-to-be’ and the non-thetic consciousness of itself) and impersonal (there is no *me*: I am faced with the pain of Peter in the same way I am faced with the colour of this inkwell. There is an objective world of things and actions that have been performed or are going to be performed, and actions come to adhere like qualities to the things that summon them). Now, this first moment of desire—supposing it has not completely escaped the notice of the theorists of *amour-propre*—is not considered by them to be a complete and autonomous moment. They have imagined behind it another state which remains in the shadows: for example, I aid Peter so as to put an end to the unpleasant state in which the sight of his sufferings has put me. But this unpleasant state cannot be known as such and one can attempt to suppress it only after an act of reflection. A feeling of displeasure on the unreflected level is transcended in the same way as the unreflected consciousness of pity. It is the intuitive grasp of the disagreeable quality of an object. And, insofar as it may be accompanied by a desire, it desires not to suppress itself but to suppress the unpleasant object.<sup>41</sup> It is thus a waste of time to place behind the unreflected consciousness of pity an unpleasant state that will then be viewed as the profound cause of the act of pity. If this consciousness of displeasure does not turn back on itself in order to posit itself by itself as an unpleasant state, we will remain indefinitely in the impersonal and unreflected domain. And thus, without even realizing it, the theorists of *amour-propre* suppose that the reflected comes first, as something original and concealed in the unconscious. There is hardly any need to bring out the

absurdity of such a hypothesis. Even if the unconscious exists,<sup>42</sup> who will ever be persuaded that it conceals within itself spontaneities of a reflected form? Is it not the definition of the reflected that it is posited by a consciousness? But in addition, how can we accept that the reflected comes first with relation to the unreflected? We can doubtless conceive a consciousness appearing immediately as reflected, in certain cases. But even then, the unreflected has an ontological priority over the reflected, since it does not need to be reflected in order to exist, and reflection presupposes the intervention of a second-order consciousness.

We thus reach the following conclusion: unreflected consciousness must be considered as autonomous.<sup>43</sup> It is a totality that has no need to be completed and we must recognize without further ado that the quality of unreflected desire is that it transcends itself by grasping, in the object, the quality of desirability. It is just as if we lived in a world where objects, apart from their qualities of heat, odour, shape, etc., had those of repulsive, attractive, charming, useful, etc., etc., and as if these qualities were forces that performed certain actions on us. In the case of reflection, and in this case alone, affectivity is posed for itself, as desire, fear, etc.; in the case of reflection alone can I think 'I hate Peter', 'I pity Paul', etc. It is thus, conversely to what has been maintained, on this level that egotistic life is placed, and on the unreflected level that is placed impersonal life (which of course does not mean that all reflective life is necessarily egotistic nor all unreflected life necessarily altruistic). Reflection 'poisons' desire.<sup>44</sup> On the unreflected level I come to Peter's aid because Peter is 'needing-to-be-aided'. But if my state is suddenly transformed into a reflected state, then I am watching myself acting, in the same sense that we say of someone that he is listening to himself talking. It is no longer Peter who attracts me, it is *my* helpful consciousness that appears to me as having to be perpetuated. Even if I merely think that I must pursue my action because 'it is good', the good qualifies my behaviour, *my* pity, etc. La Rochefoucauld's psychology has found its rightful place. And yet, it is not *true*: it is not my fault if my reflective life poisons 'in essence' my spontaneous life, and in any case reflective life generally presupposes spontaneous life. Before being 'poisoned', my desires were pure; it is the point of view I have adopted towards them that has poisoned them. La Rochefoucauld's psychology is true only for the particular feelings that take their origin from reflective life,

i.e. those that are given first and foremost as *my feelings*, instead of first being transcended towards an object.

Thus the purely psychological examination of ‘inner-worldly’ consciousness leads us to the same conclusions as our phenomenological study: the I must not be sought *in* unreflected states of consciousness nor *behind* them. The *me* appears only with the reflective act, as the noematic correlative<sup>45</sup> of a reflective intention. We are starting to glimpse how the I and the *me* are in fact one. We are going to try and show that this Ego, of which I and *me* are merely two faces, constitutes the ideal (noematic) and indirect unity of the infinite series of our reflected consciousnesses.

The I is the Ego as the unity of its actions. The *me* is the Ego as the unity of states and qualities. The distinction drawn between these two aspects of a single reality strikes me as simply functional, not to say grammatical.

## II.

### THE CONSTITUTION OF THE EGO

The Ego is not directly the unity of reflected consciousnesses. There exists an *immanent* unity of these consciousnesses, namely the stream of consciousness constituting itself as the unity of itself<sup>c</sup>—and a *transcendent* unity: states and actions. The Ego is the unity of states and actions—only optionally of qualities. It is the unity of transcendent unities, and itself transcendent. It is a transcendent pole of synthetic unity, like the object-pole of the unreflected attitude. But this pole appears only in the world of reflection. I am going to examine successively the constitution of *states*, *actions* and *qualities*, and the way the *me* appears as the pole of these transcendences.<sup>46</sup>

#### (A)

##### **States as transcendent unities of consciousnesses**

The *state* appears to reflective consciousness. It gives itself to that consciousness and becomes the object of a concrete intuition. If I hate Peter, my hatred of Peter is a state that I can grasp by reflection. This state is *present* to the gaze of reflective consciousness, it is *real*. Should we thus conclude that it is immanent, sure and certain? Of course not. We must not make of reflection a mysterious and infallible power, or believe that

everything that reflection attains is indubitable *because* it is attained by reflection. Reflection has *de facto* and *de jure* limits. It is a consciousness that posits a consciousness. Everything that it affirms about this consciousness is certain and adequate. But if other objects appear to it through this consciousness, these objects have no reason to participate in the characteristics of consciousness. Let us consider a reflective experience of hatred.<sup>47</sup> I see Peter, I feel a kind of profound upheaval of revulsion and anger on seeing him (I am already on the reflective level); this upheaval is consciousness. I cannot be in error when I say: I feel at this moment a violent revulsion towards Peter. But is this experience of revulsion hatred? Obviously not. It is in any case not given as such. After all, I have hated Peter for a long time and I think I always will hate him. So an instantaneous consciousness of revulsion cannot be my hatred. Even if I limit it to what it is, to an instantaneous moment, I will not be able to continue talking of hatred. I would say: 'I feel revulsion for Peter *at this moment*', and in this way I will not implicate the future. But precisely because of this refusal to implicate the future, I would cease to hate.

But my hatred appears to me at the same time as my experience of revulsion. But it appears *through* this experience. It is given precisely as not being limited to this experience. It is given, *in* and *by* each movement of disgust, revulsion and anger, but at the same time it *is not* any of them, it goes beyond each of them as it affirms its permanence. Hatred affirms that it was already appearing when, yesterday, I thought of Peter with so much fury, and that it will appear tomorrow. Furthermore, it draws, by itself, a distinction between *being* and *seeming*, since it is given as continuing *to be* even when I am absorbed in other occupations and when no consciousness reveals it. This is enough, it seems to me, for one *to be* able to affirm that hatred is not *a form of* consciousness. It extends beyond the instantaneous moment of consciousness and it is not subject to the absolute law of consciousness for which there is no distinction possible between appearance and being. Hatred is thus a transcendent object. Each *Erlebnis*<sup>48</sup> reveals it in its entirety but at the same time is merely a profile of it, a projection (an *Abschattung*). Hatred is a letter of credit for an infinity of angry or revulsed consciousnesses, in the past and the future. It is the transcendent unity of that infinity of consciousnesses. So, to say 'I hate' or 'I love' on the occasion of a singular consciousness of attraction or revulsion is to perform



a veritable infinitization, somewhat analogous to the one we carry out when we perceive *an* inkwell or *the blue* of the blotter.

No more is needed for the rights of reflection to be singularly limited: it is certain that I loathe Peter, but it is and will always remain doubtful whether I hate him.<sup>49</sup> This affirmation, after all, goes infinitely beyond the power of reflection. We must not, of course, conclude that hatred is a mere hypothesis, an empty concept. It truly is a real object, which I grasp through the *Erlebnis*, but this object is outside consciousness and the very nature of its existence implies its 'dubitability'. Thus reflection has a domain of certainty and a domain of doubt, a sphere of adequate evidence and a sphere of inadequate evidence. Pure reflection (which is, however, not necessarily phenomenological reflection) stays with the given without making any claims about the future. This can be seen when someone, after exclaiming in anger, 'I hate you,' corrects himself and says, 'That's not true, I don't hate you, it was anger that made me say it.' We can here see two reflections: the one, impure and complicitous, which carries out an infinitization of the field, and which suddenly constitutes hatred through the *Erlebnis* as its transcendent object, and the other, pure, simply descriptive, which disarms unreflected consciousness by giving it back its instantaneous character. These two reflections have apprehended the same, certain data but the one reflection has affirmed more than it knew and has aimed itself through reflected consciousness at an object situated outside consciousness.

As soon as we leave the domain of pure or impure consciousness and meditate on its results, we are tempted to merge the transcendent sense of the *Erlebnis* with its immanent character. This merging leads the psychologist to two sorts of error. The first error lies in this: from the fact that I am often mistaken in my feelings, or from the fact that, for example, I sometimes think I love where in fact I hate, I conclude that introspection is deceptive; in this case I definitively separate my *state* from the ways in which it appears; I believe that a symbolic interpretation of all appearances (considered as symbols) is necessary to determine the nature of the feeling, and I suppose a causal relation between the feeling and the ways in which it appears: and then we are back with the unconscious. The second error takes this form: from the fact that (as opposed to the first case) I know that my introspection is accurate, that I cannot doubt my consciousness of revulsion while I have it, I believe that I am authorized to transfer this certainty to the

feeling, I conclude that my hatred can be enclosed in the immanence and the adequacy of an instantaneous consciousness.

Hatred is a *state*. And by using this term, I have tried to express the character of passivity that constitutes it. Undoubtedly it will be objected that hatred is a force, an irresistible impulse, etc. But an electric current or a waterfall are also forces to be reckoned with; does this in any way lessen the passivity and inertia of their nature? Do they any the less receive their energy *from outside*? The passivity of a spatio-temporal thing is constituted on the basis of its existential relativity. A relative existence can only be passive, since the least activity would free it from its relative status and would constitute it as absolute. Likewise hatred, as an existence relative to the reflective consciousness, is *inert*. And, of course, in talking of the inertia of hatred, we do not mean anything other than that it *appears* that way to consciousness. Do we not say, after all, 'My hatred was reawakened...', 'His hatred was countered by the violent desire to...', etc? Are not the struggles of hatred against morality, censorship, etc., imagined as conflicts between *physical* forces, to the extent that Balzac and most novelists (sometimes even Proust) apply to states the principle of the independence of forces? The entire psychology of states (and non-phenomenological psychology in general) is a psychology of the inert.

The state is given as being, to a certain extent, intermediary between the body (the immediate 'thing') and the *Erlebnis*. However, it is not given as acting in the same way on the body as it is on consciousness. On the body, its action is openly and obviously causal. It is the cause of my mimicry, the cause of my gestures: 'Why were you so unpleasant to Peter?' '*Because I detest him.*' But the same cannot possibly be true (except in theories constructed a priori and with empty concepts, such as Freudianism) of consciousness. In fact, there is no case in which reflection can be mistaken about the spontaneity of the reflected consciousness; it is the domain of reflective certainty. Thus the relation between hatred and the instantaneous consciousness of disgust is constructed in such a way as to cope simultaneously with the demands of hatred (the demand to be first, to be the *origin*), and the sure and certain data of reflection (spontaneity); the consciousness of disgust appears to reflection as a spontaneous emanation of hatred. We encounter here for the first time this notion of *emanation*, which is so important whenever inert psychical states have to be linked with the spontaneities of consciousness. Repulsion appears, as it were, to



produce itself *at the prompting* of hatred and *at the expense* of hatred. Hatred appears through it as that from which it emanates. We readily acknowledge that the relation of hatred to the particular *Erlebnis* of repulsion is not logical. It is, to be sure, a magical link.<sup>50</sup> But our aim has simply been to describe and nothing more, and, in addition, we shall soon see that it is in exclusively magical terms that we have to describe the relations between the *me* and consciousness.

## (B)

### **The constitution of *actions***

I shall not be attempting to establish a distinction between *active* consciousness and simply spontaneous consciousness. Furthermore, it seems to me that this is one of the most difficult problems in phenomenology. I would simply like to point out that concerted action is before all else (and whatever the nature of the active consciousness may be) a transcendent factor. This is evident for actions such as ‘playing the piano’, ‘driving a car’, or ‘writing’, because these actions are ‘taken’ from the world of things. But purely psychical actions, such as doubting, reasoning, meditating, making a hypothesis, must also be conceived of as transcendences. What misleads us here is the fact that action is not merely the noematic unity of a stream of consciousness; it is also a concrete realization. But it must not be forgotten that action requires time in which to be carried out. It has individual sections and moments. To these moments there correspond active, concrete consciousnesses, and the reflection that is aimed at the consciousnesses apprehends the total action in an intuition which displays it as the transcendent unity of active consciousnesses. In this sense, it is possible to say that the spontaneous doubt that fills me when I glimpse an object in the half-light is a *consciousness*, but the methodical doubt of Descartes is an action, i.e. a transcendent object of reflective consciousness. The danger here is evident: when Descartes says, ‘I doubt therefore I am’, is he talking about the spontaneous doubt that reflective consciousness grasps in its instantaneous character, or is he talking of nothing other than the *enterprise* of doubting? This ambiguity, as we have seen, can be the source of serious errors.

(C)

### **Qualities as optional unities of states**

The Ego is immediately, as we shall see, the transcendent unity of states and actions. Nonetheless, there may be an intermediary between the Ego on the one hand and states and actions on the other, namely, quality. When we have several times over experienced hatred for different people or deep-rooted rancour or long-lasting anger, we unify these various manifestations by intending a psychical disposition to produce them. This psychical disposition (I am full of rancour, I am capable of violent hatred, I am inclined to anger) is naturally something more than and different from a simple average. It is a transcendent object. It represents the substratum of states just as states represent the substratum of *Erlebnisse*. But its relation to feelings is not a relation of emanation. Emanation merely links together consciousnesses to psychical passivities. The relation of quality to state (or to action) is a relation of actualization. The quality is given as a potentiality, a virtuality which, under the influence of various factors, may pass over into actuality. Its actuality is precisely the state (or the action). The essential difference between quality and state is evident. The state is the noematic unity of spontaneities, the quality is the unity of objective passivities. In the absence of any consciousness of hatred, hatred is given as an existent in act. Conversely, in the absence of any feeling of rancour, the corresponding quality remains a potentiality. Potentiality is not mere possibility:<sup>51</sup> it is presented as something that really exists, but whose mode of existence consists of remaining as a potentiality. To this type naturally belong failings, virtues, tastes, talents, tendencies, instincts, etc. These unifications are always possible. The influence of preconceived ideas and social factors is preponderant here. However, they are never indispensable, since states and actions can find directly in the Ego the unity that they require.

(D)

### **The constitution of the Ego as a pole of actions, states, and qualities**

We have just learnt to distinguish between the 'psychical' and consciousness. The psychical is the transcendent object of the reflective consciousness;<sup>d 52</sup> it is also the object of the science called psychology. The Ego appears to reflection as a transcendent object realizing the permanent

synthesis of the psychical. The Ego is *on the same side as* the psychical.<sup>53</sup> I will note here that the Ego under consideration is psychical and not psycho-physical. It is not through abstraction that we separate out these two aspects of the Ego. The psycho-physical *me* is a synthetic enrichment of the psychical Ego, which can easily (and without any kind of reduction) exist in the free state. It is certain, for example, that when someone says, 'I am an indecisive person,' it is not the psycho-physical *me* that is being directly indicated.

It would be tempting to constitute the Ego as a 'subject-pole', like that 'object-pole' which Husserl places at the centre of the noematic kernel. This object-pole is an X, which is the support of determinations:

*The predicates are, however, predicates of 'something', and this 'something' also belongs, and obviously inseparably, to the core in question: it is the central point of unity of which we spoke above. It is the central point of connection or the 'bearer' of the predicates, but in no way is it a unity of them. In the sense in which any complex, any combination, of the predicates would be called a unity. It is necessarily to be distinguished from them, although not to be placed along-side and separated from them; just as, conversely, they are its predicates: unthinkable without it, yet distinguishable from it.<sup>e</sup>*

Husserl is hereby intent on underlining the way he considers things as syntheses that are at least ideally analysable. Doubt-less, this tree, this table are synthetic complexes and every quality is linked to every other quality. But it is linked to it *insofar as it belongs to the same object X*. What is logically prior are the unilateral relations by which each quality belongs (directly or indirectly) to that X as a predicate belongs to a subject. Consequently, an analysis is always possible. This conception is highly debatable.<sup>54</sup> But here is not the place to examine it. The important thing as far as we are concerned is the fact that an indissoluble synthetic totality that could support itself would have no need of any supporting X, on condition, of course, that it is really and concretely unanalysable. It is useless, for instance, if we consider a melody, to suppose there is some X which acts as a support for the different notes.<sup>55</sup> The unity stems in this case from the absolute indissolubility of elements which cannot be conceived of as

separate, except by abstraction. The subject of the predicate will here be the concrete totality, and the predicate will be a quality abstractly separated from the totality and gaining its full meaning only when it is linked back to the totality.<sup>f</sup>

For these very reasons, I refuse to see in the Ego a sort of X pole acting as the support for psychical phenomena. Such an X would by definition be indifferent to the psychical qualities of which it would be the support. But the Ego, as we shall see, is never indifferent to its states, it is 'compromised' by them. Now, precisely, a support can never be compromised in this way by what it supports except when it is a concrete totality that supports and contains its own qualities. The Ego is nothing other than the concrete totality of states and actions that it supports. Doubtless it is transcendent to all the states that it unifies, but not as an abstract X whose mission is merely to unify: it is, rather, the infinite totality of states and actions that never permits itself to be reduced to *one* action or *one* state. If one were looking for an analogy for the unreflected consciousness of what the Ego is for second-order consciousness, in my view we should think rather of the *World*, conceived as the infinite synthetic totality of all things. It also happens, indeed, that we grasp the World beyond our immediate surroundings as a vast concrete existence. In this case, the things surrounding us appear merely as the extreme point of that world which surpasses them and envelopes them. The Ego is to psychical objects what the World is to things. However, the appearance of the World in the background of things is quite rare; special circumstances are required (well described by Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit*) for the world to 'unveil' itself.<sup>56</sup> The Ego, on the contrary, always appears on the horizon of states. Each state, each action is given as being separable only by abstraction from the Ego. And if judgement separates the 'I' from its state (as in the phrase, 'I am in love'), this can only be so as to link them immediately together; the movement of separation would lead to an empty, false meaning if it were not given as incomplete and if it were not completed by a movement of synthesis.

This transcendent totality participates in the dubious character of all transcendence; in other words, everything that is given us by our intuitions of the Ego can always be contradicted by later intuitions and is given as such. For example, I may see clearly that I am prone to anger, jealous, etc., and yet I may be wrong. In other words, I may be wrong in thinking that I

have a *me of that sort*. The error is in any case not committed on the level of judgement, but already on the level of prejudgemental evidential certainty. This dubious character of my Ego—or even the intuitive error that I commit—does not mean that I have a *real me* that I am ignorant of, but only that the Ego intended carries within itself the character of dubitability (in certain cases, the character of falseness). One cannot rule out the metaphysical hypothesis that my Ego is not composed of elements that have existed in reality (ten years or one second ago), but is merely constituted by false memories. The power of the ‘evil genius’ extends this far.

But if it is the nature of the Ego to be a *dubious* object, it does not follow that it is *hypothetical*. Indeed, the Ego is the spontaneous transcendent unification of our states and our actions. In this capacity, it is not a hypothesis. I do not say to myself, ‘Perhaps I have an Ego’, in the way I can say to myself, ‘Perhaps I hate Peter’. I am not here seeking for a unifying *meaning* to my acts. When I unify my consciousnesses under the rubric ‘hatred’, I add to them a certain meaning, I qualify them. But when I incorporate my states into the concrete totality *me*, I add nothing to them. And this is because the relation of the Ego to the qualities, states and actions is neither a relation of emanation (like the relation of consciousness to feelings), nor a relation of actualization (like the relation of quality to state). It is a relation of poetic production (in the sense of *poiein*), or, if you prefer, of creation.

Everyone, by referring to the results of his intuition, can observe that the Ego is given as producing its states. I am here undertaking a description of this transcendent Ego as it is revealed to intuition. I will thus start out from this undeniable fact: each new fact is attached directly (or indirectly, through quality) to the Ego as to its origin. This mode of creation is indeed a creation *ex nihilo*, in this sense that the state is not given as having previously been within the Ego. Even if hatred is given as the actualization of a certain potentiality for rancour or hatred, it remains something completely new in comparison with the potentiality that it actualizes. Thus the unifying act of reflection links each new state in a very special way to the concrete totality *me*. It is not limited to grasping it as joining that totality, as melting into it; it intends a relation that crosses time backwards and gives the *me* as the source of the state. The same is of course true for actions in relation to the I. As for qualities, although they *qualify* the *me*, they are not given as something by which it exists (as is for example the

case for an aggregate: each stone, each brick exists by itself and their aggregate exists by each one of them). But, conversely, the Ego maintains its qualities by a veritable continuous creation. However, we do not grasp the Ego as being finally a pure creative source besides qualities. It does not seem to us as if we could find a skeletal pole if we removed one by one all the qualities. If the Ego appears as lying beyond each quality or even beyond all of them, this is because it is opaque like an object: we would have to undertake an infinite stripping away if we were to remove all its potentialities. And, at the end of this stripping away, there would be nothing left, the Ego would have vanished. The Ego is the creator of its states and sustains its qualities in existence by a sort of conserving spontaneity. This creative or conserving spontaneity should not be confused with responsibility, which is a special case of creative production starting from the Ego. It would be interesting to study the different kinds of procession leading from the Ego to its states. Most of the time, what is involved is a magical procession. On other occasions, it may be rational (in the case of a reflected will, for example). But it always retains a ground of unintelligibility, which I will be giving an account of shortly. With different consciousnesses (pre-logical, infantile, schizophrenic, logical, etc.), the nuance of creation varies, but it always remains a poetic production. A most particular case, of the greatest interest, is that of the psychosis of influence. What does a patient mean by the words, ‘They *are making me have* wicked thoughts’? I will try to study this in another work.<sup>57</sup> I will remark here, meanwhile, that the spontaneity of the Ego is not denied: it is to some extent *spellbound*,<sup>58</sup> but it is still there.

But this spontaneity must not be confused with that of consciousness. The Ego, after all, being an object, is *passive*. So what we have here is a pseudo-spontaneity that would find suitable symbols in the gushing forth of a spring, a geyser, etc. In other words, we are dealing with a mere appearance. Real spontaneity must be perfectly clear: it is what it produces and cannot be anything other. Synthetically linked to anything other than itself, it would indeed include a certain obscurity and even a certain passivity in the transformation. We would be forced, in fact, to admit that it is turning from *itself* into *something else*, which would in turn presuppose that spontaneity exceeds itself. The spontaneity of the Ego exceeds itself because the Ego’s hatred, although unable to exist by itself alone, possesses in spite of everything a certain independence *vis-à-vis* the Ego. As a result,

the Ego is always surpassed by what it produces, even though, from another point of view, it is what it produces. Hence those familiar exclamations of astonishment: ‘To think that I could have done that!’, ‘To think that I could hate my father!’ etc., etc. Here, obviously, the concrete ensemble of the *me*, as intuited hitherto, weighs down on this productive I and holds it back a little from what that I has just produced. The link between the Ego and its states thus remains an unintelligible spontaneity.<sup>59</sup> It is this spontaneity that was described by Bergson in *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, it is this spontaneity that he takes for freedom, without realizing that he is describing an *object* and not a consciousness and that the link he is positing is perfectly irrational because the producer is passive *vis-à-vis* the thing created. However irrational it may be, this link is nonetheless the one that we observe in the intuition of the Ego. And we grasp its meaning: the Ego is an object apprehended but also *constituted* by reflective knowledge. It is a virtual locus of unity, and consciousness constitutes it as going in *completely the reverse direction* from that followed by real production; what is *really* first is consciousnesses, through which are constituted states, then, through these, the Ego. But, as the order is reversed by a consciousness that imprisons itself in the World in order to flee from itself, consciousnesses are given as emanating from states, and states as produced by the Ego.<sup>60</sup> As a consequence, consciousness projects its own spontaneity into the object Ego so as to confer on it the creative power that is absolutely necessary to it. However, this spontaneity, *represented and hypostatized* in an object, becomes a bastard, degenerate spontaneity, which magically preserves its creative potentiality while becoming passive. Hence the profound irrationality of the notion of Ego. We are acquainted with other degraded aspects of conscious spontaneity. I will mention just one: an expressive<sup>61</sup> and subtle mimicry can yield to us the *Erlebnis* of our interlocutor with all its meaning, all its nuances, all its freshness. But it yields that *Erlebnis* to us in a *degraded*, that is to say, *passive* form. We are thus surrounded by magical objects which retain, as it were, a memory of the spontaneity of consciousness, while still being objects of the world. That is why man is always a sorcerer for man. Indeed, this poetic link between two passivities, one of which creates the other spontaneously, is the very basis of sorcery: it is the deep sense of ‘participation’. That is also why we are sorcerers for ourselves, each time that we take our *me* into consideration.



By virtue of this passivity, the Ego is capable of being *affected*. Nothing can act on consciousness, since it is the cause of itself. But, on the contrary, the Ego that produces is affected by the repercussions from what it produces. It is 'compromised'<sup>62</sup> by what it produces. The relations are here inverted: the action or the state turns back on to the Ego in order to qualify it. This brings us back again to the relationship of participation. Every new state produced by the Ego colours and nuances the Ego in the moment the Ego produces it. The Ego is to some extent spellbound by this action, and participates in it. It is not the crime committed by Raskolnikov that is incorporated into his Ego. Or rather, to be precise, it is the crime, but in a condensed form, in the shape of a bruise. Thus everything produced by the Ego acts upon it; we need to add: and *only* what it produces. It might be objected that the me can be transformed by external events (ruin, bereavement, disappointments, change of social environment, etc.). But this is only insofar as they are for it the occasion of states or actions. It is just as if the Ego were preserved by its ghostly spontaneity from any direct contact with the exterior, as if it could communicate with the World only through the intermediary of states and actions. The reason for this isolation is clear: it is quite simply because the Ego is an object that appears only to reflection, and which thereby is radically cut off from the World. It does not live on the same level.

Just as the Ego is an irrational synthesis of activity and passivity, it is also an irrational synthesis of inwardness and transcendence. It is, in one sense, more 'inward' to consciousness than are states. It is in the most exact sense the inwardness of reflected consciousness, as contemplated by reflective consciousness. But it is easy to understand that reflection, in *contemplating* inwardness, makes it an object placed before it. But what do we mean by inwardness? Merely this: that for consciousness, to be and to know oneself are one and the same thing. This can be expressed in different ways. I can say, for example, that, for consciousness, appearance is the absolute insofar as it is appearance, or else that consciousness is a being whose essence implies existence.<sup>63</sup> These different formulations allow us to conclude that inwardness *is lived* (that we '*exist inward*'), but that it is not contemplated, since it would itself lie beyond contemplation, as its precondition. It would be useless to object that reflection posits reflected consciousness and thereby its inwardness. It is a special case: reflection and reflected are one and the same, as Husserl very clearly showed,<sup>64</sup> and the inwardness of the



one melts into that of the other. But to posit inwardness as in front of oneself is perforce to give it the weight of an object. It is as if inwardness were closed back on itself and exhibited to us merely its external aspects; as if we had to 'go all round it' in order to understand it. And it is just in this way that the Ego yields itself to reflection: as an inwardness closed in on itself. It is inward *for itself*, not for consciousness. Of course, we are here dealing yet again with a contradictory composite; indeed, an absolute inwardness never has any outside. It can be conceived only through itself and this is why we cannot grasp the consciousnesses of another (for this reason alone, and not because bodies separate us). In reality, this degraded and irrational inwardness can be analysed into two highly specific structures: *intimacy* and *indistinctness*. In relation to consciousness, the Ego is given as intimate. It is just as if the Ego were *part of consciousness*, with the sole and essential difference that it is opaque to consciousness. And this opacity is grasped as *lack of distinctness*. Lack of distinctness, a notion frequently used in philosophy, in various forms, is inwardness seen from outside, or, if you prefer, the degraded projection of inwardness. It is this lack of distinctness that can be found for example in the well-known 'interpenetrative multiplicity' of Bergson. It is also this lack of distinctness, prior to the specifications of *natura naturata*, that we find in the God of several mystics. Sometimes it can be understood as a primordial undifferentiation of all qualities, sometimes as a pure form of being, prior to all qualification. These two forms of lack of distinctness belong to the Ego, depending on the way it is considered. In waiting, for example (or when Marcel Arland explains that an extra-ordinary event is needed to reveal the true *me*),<sup>65</sup> the Ego displays itself as a bare potentiality, which will become more precise and fixed as it comes into contact with events.<sup>g, 66</sup> Conversely, after action, it seems that the Ego reabsorbs the finished act into an interpenetrative multiplicity. In both cases, what we have here is a concrete totality, but the totalitarian synthesis is performed with different intentions. Perhaps one might go so far as to say that the Ego, in relation to the past, is an interpenetrative multiplicity and, in relation to the future, a bare potentiality. But we must here beware of being excessively schematic.

The *me*, as such, remains unknown to us. And that is easy to understand: it is given as an object. So the only method for getting to know it is observation, approximation, waiting, experience. But these procedures, which are perfectly suitable for the entire domain of the *non-intimate*

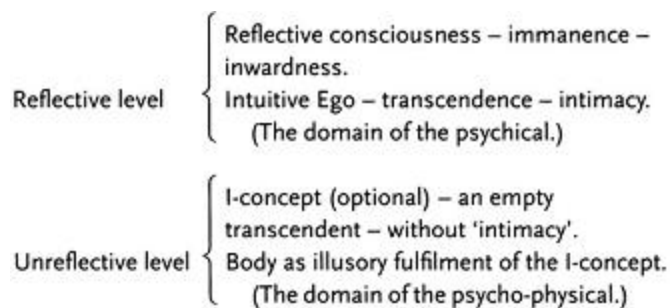
transcendent, are not suitable here, by virtue of the very intimacy of the me. It is too present for one to look at it from a really external point of view. If we move away from it to gain the vantage of distance, it accompanies us in this withdrawal. It is infinitely close and I cannot circle round it. Am I lazy or hardworking? I will find out, no doubt, if I ask those who know me and if I ask them for their opinion. Or else, I can collect the facts that concern me and try to interpret them *as objectively as if I were dealing with another person*. But it would be futile to ask the me directly and try to take advantage of its intimacy to get to know it. Quite the contrary: it is this intimacy that bars our route. Thus, 'to know oneself well' is inevitably to look at oneself from the point of view of someone else, in other words from a point of view that is necessarily false.<sup>67</sup> And all those who have tried to know themselves will agree that this attempt at introspection appears, right from the start, as an effort to reconstitute, with detached pieces, with isolated fragments, what is originally given *all at once*, in a single surge. Thus the intuition of the Ego is a perpetually deceptive mirage, since, at one and the same time, it yields everything and it yields nothing. And how, indeed, could it be otherwise, since the Ego is not the real totality of consciousnesses (this totality would be self-contradictory, like any infinite totality actualized), but the *ideal* unity of all states and actions. Since it is ideal, of course, this unity may embrace an infinity of states. But it is easy to see that what is yielded to full, concrete intuition is merely this unity *insofar as* it incorporates into itself the present state. Starting from this concrete kernel, a greater or smaller number of empty intentions (a *de jure* infinity of them) are directed at the past and the future and aim at states and actions that are not presently given. Those who have any knowledge of phenomenology will not find it difficult to understand that the Ego is at one and the same time an ideal unity of states, the majority of which are absent, and a concrete totality giving itself entirely to intuition. This means simply that the Ego is a noematic, and not a noetic, unity. A tree or a chair does not exist in any other way. Of course, empty intentions can always be fulfilled, and absolutely any state, or any action, can always reappear to consciousness as being or having been produced by the Ego.

Finally, what radically prevents one from acquiring any real knowledge of the Ego is the quite special way in which it is given to reflective consciousness. In fact, the Ego never appears except when we are not looking at it. The reflective gaze has to fix itself on the *Erlebnis*, insofar as

it emanates from the state. Then, behind the state, on the horizon, the Ego appears. So it is never seen except 'out of the corner of one's eye'. The moment I turn my gaze on it and wish to reach it without going via the *Erlebnis* and the state, it vanishes. The reason is this: in seeking to grasp the Ego for itself and as the direct object of my consciousness, I fall back on to the unreflected level and the Ego disappears with the reflective act. Hence this impression of irritating uncertainty, which many philosophers translate by seeing the I as falling short of the state of consciousness and asserting that consciousness must turn round on itself in order to glimpse the I behind it. That is not the real reason: rather, the Ego is *by nature* elusive.

It is however certain that the I appears on the unreflected level. If I am asked, 'What are you doing?' and I reply, preoccupied as I am, 'I am trying to hang up this picture', or, 'I am repairing the rear tyre', these phrases do not transport us on to the level of reflection, I utter them without ceasing to work, without ceasing to envisage just the actions, insofar as they have been done or are still to be done—not insofar as I am doing them. But this 'I' that I am dealing with here is not, however, a simple syntactic form. It has a meaning; it is quite simply an empty concept, destined to remain empty. Just as I can think of a chair in the absence of any chair and by virtue of a mere concept, in the same way I can think of the I in the absence of the I. This becomes obvious if we consider phrases such as, 'What are you doing this afternoon?'—'I'm going to the office'; or, 'I met my friend Peter'; or, 'I really must write to him', etc., etc. But the I, in falling from the reflected to the unreflected level, does not merely empty itself. It becomes degraded: it loses its *intimacy*. The concept cannot ever be filled by the data of intuition since it is now aimed at something other than them. The I that we find here is to some extent that which supports the actions that (I) do or must do in the world, insofar as they are qualities of the world and not unities of consciousnesses. For example: the wood *must* be broken into little pieces for the fire to catch. It *must*: it is a quality of the wood and an objective relation between the wood and the fire that *must* be lit. Right now I am breaking the wood, i.e. the action is being realized in the world and the objective and empty support of this action is the *I-concept*. That is why the body and the body's images can complete the total degradation of the concrete I of reflection into an *I-concept* by acting as an illusory fulfilment for the latter.<sup>68</sup> say that 'I' am breaking wood, and I see and sense the object 'wood' in the act of breaking wood. The body thus acts as a visible and

tangible symbol for the I. We can thus see the series of refractions and degradations that any 'egology' should focus on.



(E)

### The *I* and consciousness in the Cogito

One might ask why the I appears on the occasion of the Cogito since the Cogito, if it is performed correctly, is the apprehension of a pure consciousness, without the constitution of a state or an action. The fact is that the I is not necessary here, since it is never the direct unity of consciousnesses. One can even suppose a consciousness performing a pure reflective act which would present itself to itself as a non-personal spontaneity. However, we have to consider the fact that the phenomenological reduction is never perfect. A whole host of psychological motivations plays a part here. When Descartes effects the Cogito, he does so in a way linked to methodical doubt, and to the ambition of 'making science advance', etc., which are *actions* and *states*. Thus the Cartesian method, doubt, etc., are given by nature as the enterprises of an I. It is altogether natural that the Cogito, which appears at the conclusion of these enterprises and *which is given as logically linked to methodical doubt*, sees an I appearing on its horizon. This I is a form of ideal link, a way of affirming that the Cogito is well and truly of the same form as doubt. In a word, the Cogito is impure, it is a spontaneous consciousness, no doubt, but one that remains synthetically linked to consciousnesses of states and actions. The proof of this lies in the fact that the Cogito is given at one and the same time as the logical result of doubt and also as what puts an end to that doubt.<sup>69</sup> A reflective grasp of spontaneous consciousness as a non-personal spontaneity would need to be achieved *without any anterior motivation*. It is always possible *de jure*, but remains quite improbable or, at least, extremely rare in our human condition. In any case, as I said above,

the I that appears on the horizon of the 'I think' is not given as a producer of conscious spontaneity. Consciousness is produced over against it and moves towards it, comes to meet it. This is all that can be said.

## CONCLUSION

I would like, in conclusion, simply to present the three following remarks:

### (1)

The conception of the Ego that I am putting forward seems to me to bring about the liberation of the transcendental field at the same time as its purification.

The transcendental field, purified of all egological structure, recovers its former limpidity. In one sense, it is a *nothing*, since all physical, psycho-physical and psychical objects, all truths, and all values are outside it, since the *me* has, for its part, ceased to be part of it. But this nothing is *everything* because it is the *consciousness* of all these objects. There is no longer an 'inner life' in the sense in which Brunschvicg<sup>70</sup> contrasts 'inner life' and 'spiritual life', since there is no longer anything that can be described as an *object* and can at the same time belong to the intimacy of consciousness. Doubts, remorse, the so-called 'crises of consciousness', etc., in short all the material of people's diaries become mere *representations*. And perhaps one could draw from this a few healthy precepts of moral discretion. But, in addition, we have to note that, from this point of view, my feelings and my states, my Ego itself, cease to be my exclusive property. Let me put it more precisely: up until now, a radical distinction has been drawn between the objectivity of the spatio-temporal thing or of an eternal truth and the subjectivity of psychical 'states'. It seemed that the subject enjoyed a privileged position *vis-à-vis* its own states. On this view, when two men speak about the same chair, they are speaking about one and the *same* thing—this chair which the one takes and lifts up is the *same* as the one which the other sees, there is no mere correspondence of images, there is a single object. But it seemed that when Paul tried to understand one of Peter's psychical states, he could not *reach* this state, an intuitive grasp of which belonged to Peter alone. He could merely envisage an equivalent, create empty concepts which attempted vainly to reach a reality that in essence

was unavailable to intuition. Psychological understanding took place through analogy. Phenomenology has taught us that *states* are objects,<sup>71</sup> that a feeling as such (of love or hatred) is a transcendent object and cannot contract into the unity of inwardness of a ‘consciousness’. In consequence, if Peter and Paul are both speaking about Peter’s love, for instance, it is no longer true that the one is speaking blindly and by analogy of what the other grasps fully. They are speaking of the same thing; they doubtless grasp it by different procedures, but these procedures can be equally intuitive. And Peter’s feeling is no more *certain* for Peter than for Paul. It belongs, as far as both of them are concerned, to the category of objects that can be doubted. But this whole profound and new conception is compromised if the *me* of Peter, this *me* that hates or loves, remains an essential structure of consciousness. Feeling, indeed, remains attached to it. This feeling ‘adheres’ to the *me*. If the *me* is brought into consciousness, the feeling is brought along with it. I have come to the conclusion, on the contrary, that the *me* is a transcendent object like the *state* and that, therefore, it is accessible to two sorts of intuition: an intuitive grasp by the consciousness *whose me* it is, an intuitive grasp that is less clear, but no less intuitive, if grasped by other consciousnesses. In a word, Peter’s *me* is accessible to my intuition as it is to Peter’s and in both cases it is the object of inadequate evidence. If this is so, there is nothing ‘impenetrable’ left in Peter, apart from his consciousness itself. But this consciousness is *radically* impenetrable. By this I mean it is not merely refractory to intuition, but to thought. I cannot *conceive* Peter’s consciousness without turning it into an object (since I do not conceive it as being *my consciousness*). I cannot conceive it, since it would need to be conceived as pure inwardness and transcendence *at one and the same time*, which is impossible. A consciousness can conceive of no other consciousness than itself. Thus we can distinguish, thanks to our conception of the *me*, a sphere accessible to psychology, in which the external method of observation and the introspective method have the same rights and can aid each other mutually—and a pure transcendental sphere accessible to phenomenology alone.

This transcendental sphere is a sphere of *absolute* existence, i.e. a sphere of pure spontaneities, which are never objects and which determine themselves to exist. As the *me* is an object, it is obvious that I will never be able to say: my consciousness, i.e. the consciousness of my *me* (except in a purely designating sense, in the sense in which one says for example ‘The



day of my baptism'). The Ego is not the proprietor of consciousness, it is its object. To be sure, we spontaneously constitute our states and our actions as productions of the Ego. But our states and actions are also objects. We never have any direct intuition of the spontaneity of an instantaneous consciousness as produced by the Ego. That would be impossible. It is only on the level of meanings and psychological hypotheses that we can conceive of a similar production—and this error is possible only because on this level the Ego and consciousness are *empty*. In this sense, if we understand the 'I think' in such a way as to make thought into a production of the I, we have already constituted thought as passivity, as a *state*, i.e. as an object; we have left the level of pure reflection, in which the Ego doubtless appears, but on the *horizon* of spontaneity. The reflective attitude is expressed correctly by that celebrated phrase by Rimbaud (in the letter of the seer), 'I is *an other*'. The context proves that he merely meant that the spontaneity of consciousnesses cannot emanate from the I, it *goes towards* the I, it meets it, it allows it to be glimpsed under its limpid thickness but it is given above all as an *individuated* and *impersonal* spontaneity. The commonly accepted thesis, according to which our thoughts supposedly spring from an impersonal unconscious and become 'personalized' by becoming conscious, seems to me a coarse and materialistic interpretation of a correct intuition. It has been supported by psychologists<sup>72</sup> who had understood very well that consciousness did not 'come out of' the I, but who could not accept the idea of a spontaneity producing itself. These psychologists thus naively imagined that spontaneous consciousnesses 'came out of' the unconscious where they already existed, without realizing that they had merely shifted the problem of existence one stage back, a problem that ultimately has to be formulated and that they had made more obscure, since the prior existence of spontaneities in pre-conscious limits would necessarily be a *passive* existence.

I can thus formulate my thesis: transcendental consciousness is an impersonal spontaneity. It determines itself to exist at every instant, without us being able to conceive of anything *before it*. Thus every instant of our conscious lives reveals to us a creation *ex nihilo*. Not a new *arrangement* but a new existence. There is something that provokes anguish for each of us in thus grasping, as it occurs, this tireless creation of existence of which we are not the creators. On this level, man has the impression of eluding himself ceaselessly, overflowing himself, surprising himself by a richness

that is always unexpected, and it is, once again, the unconscious to which he gives the task of accounting for the way in which the *me* is thus surpassed by consciousness. In fact, the *me* can do nothing to master this spontaneity, since *the will is an object that is constituted for and by this spontaneity*. The will aims at states, feelings, or things, but it never turns back round on to consciousness. This is easy to see in the few cases where we try to will a consciousness (I *want* to go to sleep, I do not *want* to think about that, etc.). In these different cases it is *essentially* necessary that the will be maintained and preserved by the *consciousness that is radically opposed* to the consciousness that it wanted to bring into being (if I *want* to go to sleep, I remain awake; if I do not want to think about this or that event, I think of it *precisely for that reason*). In my view, this monstrous spontaneity is at the origin of various types of psychasthenia. Consciousness takes fright at its own spontaneity because it senses that it lies *beyond* freedom.<sup>73</sup> This is what can clearly be seen from an example in Janet.<sup>74</sup> A young bride suffered from a terror that, when her husband left her alone, she would go over to the window and hail the passers-by as prostitutes do. Nothing in her upbringing, in her past, or in her character can serve as an explanation for such a fear. In my view, it is simply that a circumstance of no importance (reading, conversation, etc.) had caused in her what might be called a vertigo of possibility. She found herself monstrously free and this vertiginous liberty appeared to her *on the occasion* when she was free to make this gesture that she was afraid of making. But this vertigo can be understood only if consciousness suddenly appears to itself as infinitely overflowing in its possibilities the I that ordinarily acts as its unity.

Perhaps, indeed, the essential function of the Ego is not so much theoretical as practical. I have pointed out, after all, that it does not bind closely together the unity of phenomena, that it is limited to reflecting an *ideal* unity, whereas real, concrete unity has long been achieved. But perhaps its essential role is to mask from consciousness its own spontaneity.<sup>75</sup> A phenomenological description of spontaneity would indeed show that spontaneity renders impossible any distinction between action and passion, and any conception of an autonomy of the will. These notions only have a meaning on the level where all activity is given as emanating from a passivity that it transcends, in short, on a level where man considers himself to be simultaneously both subject and object. But it is an essential



necessity that we cannot distinguish between voluntary spontaneity and involuntary spontaneity.

It is thus exactly as if consciousness constituted the Ego as a false representation of itself, as if consciousness hypnotized itself before this Ego which it has constituted, became absorbed in it, as if it made the Ego its safeguard and its law: it is, indeed, thanks to the Ego, that a distinction can be drawn between the possible and the real, between appearance and being, between what is willed and what is yielded to.

But it may happen that consciousness suddenly produces itself on the pure reflective level. Not perhaps without an Ego, but overflowing the Ego on all sides, dominating it and supporting it outside itself by a continuous creation. On this level, there is no distinction between the possible and the real, because the appearance is the absolute. There are no more barriers, no more limits, nothing that can disguise consciousness from itself. Thus consciousness, realizing what might be called the fate of its spontaneity,<sup>76</sup> suddenly becomes filled with anguish. It is this absolute and irremediable anguish, this fear of oneself, that in my view is constitutive of pure consciousness and it is this that is also the key to the psychasthenic malady I mentioned. If the I of the 'I think' is the primary structure of consciousness, this anguish is impossible. If, on the contrary, my point of view is adopted, not only does it give us a coherent explanation for this malady, but we also possess a permanent reason for effecting the phenomenological reduction. As you will know, Fink, in his *Kant-studien* article, confesses not without melancholy that, so long as one remains in the 'natural' attitude, there is *no reason*, no 'motive', for performing the *epochē*. Indeed, this natural attitude is perfectly coherent and one can find in it none of those contradictions which, according to Plato, led the philosopher to carry out a philosophical conversion. Thus the *epochē* appears in Husserl's phenomenology like a miracle. Husserl himself, in the *Cartesian Meditations*, makes a very vague allusion to certain psychological motives that might lead one to effect the reduction. But these motives hardly seem adequate and above all the reduction does not appear able to operate except after a long period of study; it thus appears as a *skilled* operation, which confers a sort of gratuitousness on it. Conversely, if the 'natural attitude' appears in its entirety as an effort that consciousness makes to escape from itself by projecting itself into the me and absorbing itself in it, and if this effort is never completely rewarded, if it merely needs

an act of simple reflection for conscious spontaneity to tear itself brusquely away from the I and give itself as independent, the *epochē* is no longer a miracle, it is no longer an intellectual method, a skilled procedure. It is an anguish that imposes itself on us and that we cannot avoid, it is at one and the same time a pure event of transcendental origin and an accident that is always possible in our daily lives.

## (2)

This conception of the Ego is, in my view, the sole possible refutation of solipsism.<sup>77</sup> The refutation presented by Husserl in *Formale und Transzendente Logik* and in the *Cartesian Meditations* does not appear to me capable of affecting a determined and intelligent solipsist. So long as the I remains a structure of consciousness, it will always remain possible to contrast the consciousness with its I on the one hand and all other existents on the other. And finally it is after all *me* who produces the world. It hardly matters if certain layers of this world necessitate, by their very nature, a relation to the other. This relation can be a simple quality of the world that I create and it in no way obliges me to accept the real existence of other I's.

But if the I becomes a transcendent, it participates in all the world's vicissitudes. It is not an absolute, it did not create the universe, it falls like other existences under the *epochē*; and solipsism becomes unthinkable as soon as the I no longer has any privileged position. Instead of being formulated as 'I exist alone as an absolute', it ought in fact to take the form, 'Absolute consciousness exists alone as absolute', which is obviously a truism. My I, indeed, *is no more certain for consciousness than the I of other men*. It is simply more intimate.

## (3)

Theoreticians of the extreme left have sometimes criticized phenomenology for being an idealism, and drowning reality in the flood of ideas. But if idealism is the philosophy without evil of M. Brunschvicg, if it is a philosophy in which the effort of spiritual assimilation<sup>78</sup> never encounters any external resistances, in which suffering, hunger, and war are diluted into a slow process of unification of ideas, then nothing can be more unjust than to call phenomenologists 'idealists'. Indeed, it has been centuries since philosophy has given evidence of such a realist trend. Phenomenologists have immersed man back in the world, they have

restored to his anguish and his sufferings, and to his rebellions too, their full weight. Unfortunately, as long as the *I* remains a structure of absolute consciousness, phenomenology can always be criticized for being a ‘refuge doctrine’, for still removing a certain portion of man from the world, and thereby turning his attention away from the real problems. In my view, this criticism is deprived of its justification if we make of the *me* an existent that is rigorously contemporary with the world, and whose existence has the same essential characteristics as the world. I have always thought that such a fertile working hypothesis as historical materialism in no way required as a basis the absurdity of metaphysical materialism.<sup>79</sup> It is, in fact, not necessary for the *object* to precede the *subject* for spiritual pseudo-values to vanish and ethics to rediscover its bases in reality. It is sufficient for the *me* to be contemporary with the World and for the subject-object duality, which is purely logical, to disappear definitively from philosophical preoccupations. The World did not create the *me*, the *me* did not create the World, they are two objects for the absolute, impersonal consciousness, and it is through that consciousness that they are linked back together. This absolute consciousness, when it is purified of the *I*, is no longer in any way a *subject*, nor is it a collection of representations; it is quite simply a precondition and an absolute source of existence. And the relation of interdependence that it establishes between the *me* and the World is enough for the *me* to appear ‘in danger’ before the world, for the *me* (indirectly and via the intermediary of the states) to draw all its content from the World. Nothing further is needed to enable us to establish philosophically an absolutely positive ethics and politics.<sup>80</sup>

# NOTES

Notes referred to by numerals translate the annotations of Sylvie Le Bon to her edition of *La Transcendance de l'Ego* (Paris: Vrin, 1965). Those referred to by small letters translate Sartre's own original notes. (Trans.)

<sup>1</sup> Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Analytic, book 1, ch. 2, section 2, §16, 'The original synthetic unity of apperception', translated by Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1963), p. 152. See also §§17–18, pp. 155–8.

<sup>2</sup> Neo-Kantianism is represented by Lachelier and Brunschvicg; empirio-criticism by Mach; as for Victor Brochard (1848–1907), he was not just a historian of ancient philosophy: he was the author of a thesis, *De l'erreur* (1879) and various articles on philosophy and ethics, collected at the end of his work *Études de philosophie ancienne et de philosophie moderne* (Paris: Vrin, 1954).

<sup>3</sup> Boutroux, *La Philosophie de Kant*, a lecture course delivered at the Sorbonne in 1896–97 (Paris: Vrin, 1926).

<sup>a</sup> I will here be using the term 'consciousness' to translate the German word *Bewusstsein* which simultaneously means both the total consciousness, the monad, and each moment of that consciousness. The expression 'state of consciousness' strikes me as imprecise because of the passivity it introduces into consciousness.

<sup>4</sup> In *Imagination* (first published in French: Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1936), Sartre, in connection with the specific problem of the image, brings out the general characteristics of the philosophical revolution represented by the appearance of phenomenology. As here, he insists on the fruitfulness of a method that aims to be descriptive, even if the 'facts' delivered to him by intuition are essences.

'Phenomenology is a description of the structure of transcendental consciousness based on intuition of the essences of these structures'

(*Imagination: A Psychological Critique*, trans. Forrest Williams (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), p. 128).

5 Husserl develops this project in *Philosophy as Rigorous Science* (first published in 1911). English translation in *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, trans.

Quentin Lauer (New York, Evanston, IL and London: Harper Torchbooks, Harper and Row, 1965).

6 ‘In immediately intuitive acts we intuit an “it itself”’: *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, vol. I, *General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, trans. F.Kersten (The Hague, Boston and London: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982) [hereafter called *Ideas*, I: Trans.], §43, p. 93.

Husserl also says that the thing is given to us ‘in flesh and blood’, or on other occasions ‘originally’, ‘in an original form’.

b Husserl would say: a science of essences. But for the point of view which we are adopting, this comes to the same thing.

7 A, ‘de facto science’ and a ‘science of essences’, or else ‘eidetic science’: these expressions here come to the same thing. Indeed, Sartre is not at this point referring to the contrast—essential though it be— between empirical fact and essence, but to the more general contrast between de facto and *de jure* problems. Now, fact and essence appear together as something *given*, and the essential thing (here) is precisely that phenomenology is the science of a given (material or ideal, it barely matters just yet), as opposed to the Kantian perspective, which raises the pure *de jure* question. It is because phenomenology aims at something given, a set of facts, that it is a *descriptive* science. Furthermore, if it is true that Husserl wanted to found a ‘science of essences’ or an ‘eidetic’ science, we must above all bear in mind here that these essences are delivered with certainty, and can be taken in by the gaze immediately, exactly in the same way as objects would be. From this point of view, they are (ideal) facts.

‘The essence (Eidos) is a new sort of object. Just as the datum of individual or experiencing intuition is an individual object, so the datum of eidetic intuition is a pure essence.... Seeing an essence is also precisely intuition, just as an eidetic object is precisely an object’ (*Ideas*, I, section I, ch. 1, ‘Matter of fact and essence’, §3, p. 9)

8 The *epochē*, the phenomenological reduction, is the bracketing of the natural attitude, always imbued as it is with a spontaneous realism. Sartre

thus, following Husserl, also designates this natural consciousness by the expression ‘intramundane consciousness’. On reduction and reductions, see *Ideas*, I, section 2, ch. 4, §§56 to 62, pp. 131–43; and the *Cartesian Meditations*, §8 (*Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), pp. 18–21.

9 Those of *Ideas*, I, mainly.

10 ‘Consequently for me, the meditating Ego who, standing and remaining in the attitude of *epochē*, posits exclusively himself as the accept-ance-basis of all Objective experiences and bases, there is no psychological Ego and there are no psychical phenomena in the sense proper to psychology, i.e., as components of psychophysical men’ (*Cartesian Meditations*, §11, pp. 25–6).

11 The problem is already raised by Husserl in §11 of the *Cartesian Meditations* already quoted, entitled ‘The psychological and the transcendental Ego’. Indeed, in the passage quoted in note 10, Husserl immediately adds, ‘By phenomenological *epochē* I reduce my natural human Ego and my psychical life—the realm of my *psychological self-experience*—to my transcendental-phenomenological Ego, the realm of *transcendental-phenomenological self-experience*’. And of this transcendental Ego he claims that one can never reduce it.

12 Sartre designates by the concept *I* the personality in its active aspect; by *me* he means the concrete psycho-physical totality of the same personality. It is clearly understood that the *I* and the *me* are united, and constitute the Ego, of which they are merely the two faces.

The status of the Ego, which is here still unsettled, becomes firmer in *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London: Methuen, 1958), pp. 162–5.

13 The consequences listed constitute the basis of the thesis that Sartre will defend, in opposition to the last works of Husserl.

14 *Logical Investigations*, vol. II, trans. J.N. Findlay (London: Routledge, 2001), V, §8, ‘The pure Ego and awareness (*‘Bewusstheit’*). Husserl’s evolution can be sensed at work within the *Logical Investigations* themselves. Indeed, Husserl writes, ‘I must frankly confess, however, that I am quite unable to find this ego, this primitive, necessary centre of relations’ (p. 92). To which he (unfortunately) added in the second (1913) edition, the following note: ‘I have since managed to find it, i.e.



have learnt not to be led astray from a pure grasp of the given through corrupt forms of ego-metaphysic' (p. 353 n. 8).

15 Cf *Ideas*, I, §80, for the image of the ray (p. 191), and especially § 57: 'The question of the exclusion of the pure Ego' (p. 132). See the fourth *Cartesian Meditation*, relative to the problems constitutive of the transcendental Ego.

16 For Sartre, the hypothesis of a transcendental *I* as a personal locus that founds and unifies every consciousness is superfluous. For him, there is merely a pre-personal or impersonal transcendental field.

*Transcendent* and *transcendental* are not taken by him in the Kantian sense, but rather in the Husserlian sense, as it is defined for example in §11 of the *Cartesian Meditations*. The transcendental field is the field that is constituted by the originating consciousnesses that bestow meaning. It needs to be pointed out that Sartre was to abandon this term (as too Kantian?), which practically disappeared in *Being and Nothingness*. There, consciousness is considered in different ways depending on whether it is unreflective or reflective. There is no longer any Ego or even any transcendental field. Conversely, the *transcendence* of the Ego remains a fundamental idea. The notions of transcendence and originality, indeed, are correlative. 'Transcendence is the constitutive structure of consciousness' (*Being and Nothingness*, p. xxxvii), i.e. consciousness is from the start torn away from itself to move out towards objects. This is the meaning of the well-known phrase, 'All consciousness is consciousness of something.' Cor-relatively, the things which are called *transcendent* to consciousness are the world and its objects (physical, cultural, etc.), insofar as they are, by definition, *outside* consciousness, and the absolute Other for consciousness.

17 On intentionality, see *Ideas*, I, section 3, ch. 2, §84: 'Intentionality as principal theme of phenomenology'; and also Sartre's article, 'Une idée fondamentale de la "phénoménologie" de Husserl: l'intention-nalite', *Nouvelle Revue française*, 52, no. 304, pp. 29–32; translated by Joseph Fell as 'Intentionality: A fundamental idea in Husserl's phenomenology', *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 1, no. 2, pp. 4–5.

18 On the self-constituting of phenomenological time, see the lectures *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* (1893–1917), §39, p. 84, entitled 'The double intentionality of retention and the constitution of the flow of consciousness', where Husserl explains that 'the flow of consciousness constitutes its own unity'.

19 See the fourth *Cartesian Meditation*, §37: ‘Time as the universal form of all egological genesis’ (p. 75).

20 ‘By substance I understand what is in itself and is conceived through Itself, that is, that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed’ (Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Edwin Curley, Part I, definition 3 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996), p. 1). Sartre says: ‘consciousness is consciousness through and through. It can be limited only by itself’ (*Being and Nothingness*, p. xxxi).

21 ‘But precisely because the question concerns an absolute of existence and not of knowledge, it is not subject to that famous objection according to which a known absolute is no longer an absolute because it becomes relative to the knowledge which one has of it. In fact the absolute here is not the result of a logical construction on the ground of knowledge but the subject of the most concrete of experiences. And it is not at all *relative* to this experience because it *is* this experience. Likewise it is a non-substantial absolute’ (*Being and Nothingness*, p. xxxii).

22 ‘Transcendence is the constitutive structure of consciousness; that is... consciousness is born supported by a being which is not itself.... Consciousness implies in its being a non-conscious and transphenomenal being.... Consciousness is a being such that in its being, its being is in question insofar as this being implies a being other than itself’ (*Being and Nothingness*, p. xxxviii).

23 ‘Every positional consciousness of an object is at the same time a non-positional consciousness of itself’ (*Being and Nothingness*, p. xxix).

24 ‘In the psychical sphere there is, in other words, no distinction between appearance and being.... Appearances themselves...do not constitute a being which itself appears by means of appearances lying behind it’ (*Philosophy as Rigorous Science*, p. 106).

‘Modern thought has realized considerable progress by reducing the existent to the series of appearances which manifest it.... The being of an existent is exactly what it *appears*. Thus we arrive at the idea of the *phenomenon* such as we can find, for example in the “phenomenology” of Husserl or of Heidegger—the phenomenon can be studied and described as such, for it is *absolutely indicative of itself*’ (*Being and Nothingness*, p. xxii).



25 This trend is indicated by the fourth *Cartesian Meditation*, which discusses ‘The full concretion of the Ego as monad’ (p. 67), and the fifth *Meditation*, entitled ‘Uncovering of the sphere of transcendental being as monadological intersubjectivity’ (p. 89).

26 The difficulties entailed by the Husserlian conception of transcendental consciousness as an ‘arche-region’ have recently been recalled in an article by Jacques Derrida published in the *Études philosophiques* (1963):

‘Phänomenologische Psychologie. Vorlesungen Sommersemester 1925, by Ed.

Husserl’. In particular, Derrida writes: ‘My transcendental *I* is radically different, as Husserl makes clear, from my natural, human *I*; and yet *nothing* distinguishes the two. The (transcendental) *I* is not an other. Above all, it is not the metaphysical or formal ghost of the empirical *me*. This would lead to a criticism of the theoretical image, and the metaphor of the *I* as an absolute spectator of its own psychical *me*, all that analogical language which we sometimes have to use to indicate the transcendental reduction and to describe that strange “object”, the psychical *me* standing over against the absolute transcendental Ego.’

27 For example, in Appendix XII: ‘Internal consciousness and the grasping of experiences’ (pp. 130–3).

28 With the ‘I am’, I grasp an apodictic certainty, as Husserl also puts it in the *Cartesian Meditations*.

29 To summarize, a phenomenological analysis of consciousness will distinguish between three degrees of consciousness:

1. 1 *a first degree* on the level of the unreflected consciousness, non-self-positing, since it is self-consciousness as consciousness of a transcendent object.  
With the Cogito:
2. 2 *a second degree*: the reflecting consciousness is non-self-positing, but it does posit the reflected consciousness.
3. 3 *a third degree*, which is a second-degreethetic act, by which the reflecting consciousness becomes self-positing.

In other words, on the level of the second degree, there are unreflected acts of reflection.

As for the autonomy of the unreflected consciousness, it is strongly affirmed in the Introduction to *Being and Nothingness*.

30 In the introduction to *Ideas*, I, Husserl declares that phenomenology demands ‘a new style of attitude...which is entirely altered in contrast to the natural attitude in experiencing and the natural attitude in thinking’ (p. xix); and, in §31, entitled ‘Radical alteration of the natural positing’ (p. 57), he makes this affirmation more explicit.

31 Husserl appeals to non-thetic memories of non-thetic consciousnesses in *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*.

32 E.B.Titchener (1867–1927) was an Anglo-American psychologist. A pupil of Wundt, he devoted himself to experimental psychology, and had an especial influence on Anglo-Saxon psychology. Among his works are: *An Outline of Psychology* (1896); *Text-Book of Psychology* (quoted here) (1910); *Experimental Psychology* (1927).

33 Sartre is here referring to the phenomenological theory of perception by ‘profiles’ or ‘sketches’, in German, *Abschattungen* [usually translated as ‘adumbrations’:

Trans.]. See *Ideas*, I, §41: ‘Of essential necessity there belongs to any “all-sided”,

continuously, unitarily, and self-confirming experimental consciousness of the same physical thing a multifarious system of continuous multiplicities of appearances and adumbrations in which all objective moments falling within perception with the characteristic of being themselves given “in person” are adumbrated by determined continuities’ (p. 87).

Sartre contrasts thought and perception, for example, in *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination* (trans. Jonathan Webber (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), Part one, ch. 1, section 3): ‘They are radically distinct phenomena: one is knowledge conscious of itself, which places itself at once in the centre of the object; the other is a synthetic unity of a multiplicity of appearances, which slowly serves its apprenticeship.’

34 Husserl seems to have had a presentiment of this, but he does not dwell on this intuition. However, in §54 of *Ideas*, I, he had written: ‘Certainly a consciousness without an animated organism and, paradoxical as it sounds, also without a psyche, a consciousness which is not personal, is imaginable. That is to say, a stream of consciousness in which the intentional unities of experience, organism, psyche, and empirical Ego-

subject did not become constituted, in which all of these experiential concepts, and therefore the concept of a mental process in the psychological sense (as a mental process of a person, an animate Ego), were without any basis and, in any case, without any validity' (pp. 127–8).

35 Husserl was never to recognize this.

‘Among the universal essential peculiarities pertaining to the transcendently purified realm of mental processes the first place is due the relationship of each mental process to the “pure” Ego. Each “cogito”, each act in a distinctive sense, is characterized as an act of the Ego, it “proceeds from out of the Ego”, it “lives”

“actionally” in the act.... No excluding can annul the form of *cogito* and cancel out the “pure” subject of the act: the “being directed to”, the “being busied with”, the “taking a position toward”, the “undergoing”, the “suffering from”, *necessarily* includes in its essence this: that it is precisely a ray “emanating from the Ego” or, in a reverse direction of the ray, “toward the Ego”—and this Ego is the *pure* Ego; no reduction can do anything to it’, *Ideas*, I, §80, The relationship of mental processes to the pure Ego’ (pp. 190–1).

Likewise, cf. the first *Cartesian Meditation*, §8, p. 21: after the reduction, I again find myself as ‘the pure ego, with the pure stream of my cogitationes’.

36 The different sorts of certainty are defined in *Ideas*, I, §3, then in the first *Cartesian Meditation*, §6.

37 Eugen Fink, *Die phänomenologische Philosophie E.Husserls in der gegenwärtigen Kritik (Kantstudien, 1933)*.

38 ‘Self-love is love of oneself and of all things in terms of oneself; it makes men worshippers of themselves and would make them tyrants over others if fortune gave them the means. It never pauses for rest outside the self, and, like bees on flowers, only settles on outside matters in order to draw from them what suits its own requirements. Nothing is so vehement as its desires, nothing so concealed as its aims, nothing so devious as its methods; its sinuosities beggar the imagination, its transformations surpass metamorphoses, its complications go beyond those of chemistry. No man can plumb the depths or pierce the darkness of its chasms’ (La Rochefoucauld, *Maxims*, 1693 supplement, trans. Leonard Tancock, §563 (Harmonds-worth: Penguin, 1959), p. 112).

39 On the double form of existence always possible for a consciousness, and guaranteeing the autonomy of the pre-reflective, see *Being and Nothingness*, Introduction.

40 The phenomenological description of desire is developed in *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 382–98.

41 Likewise, emotion is an unreflected kind of behaviour, not unconscious, but conscious of itself non-thetically, and its manner of being non-thetically self-conscious lies in the way it transcends itself and gains purchase on the world through its grasp of, as it were, the quality of things. Emotion is ‘a transformation of the world’, says the *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, trans. Philip Mairet (London: Methuen, 1962), p. 63.

42 On the problem posed by the Freudian unconscious, see, in *Being and Nothingness*, the chapter ‘Bad faith’ (pp. 47–70); and Part 4, ch. 2, section 1: ‘Existential psychoanalysis’ (pp. 557–75). See note 74 below.

43 Sartre always insisted on this autonomy of the unreflected consciousness, which finds its basis in the essential intentionality of consciousnesses. This conception of the ontological priority of the unreflected over the reflected remains central in his later works, in particular *Imagination* (the image is an ante-predicative certainty), the *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, *The Imaginary*, and *Being and Nothingness*, because it constitutes the only radical means of eliminating all idealism.

44 It is in the same way that the rake, replacing the desirable-object with his desire itself as being desirable, thereby immediately poisons that very desire. In any case, he forces it to undergo a fundamental alteration *vis-à-vis* naïve desire. Cf. *Being and Nothingness*, p. 385.

45 The terms ‘noema’ (noematic) and ‘noesis’ come from Husserl’s phenomenology.

See *Ideas*, I, section 3, ch. 3. Sartre gives a deliberately simplified definition of it in *Imagination*, ch. 4, p. 139: ‘For having put the world “between parentheses”, the phenomenologist does not lose it. The distinction “consciousness/world” loses its meaning, and the line is now drawn differently. The set of *real* elements of the conscious synthesis (the *hyle* and the various intentional acts which animate them) are distinguished from the “meaning” or “sense” which inhabits the consciousness. The concrete psychic reality is to be called *noesis*, and the indwelling meaning, *noema*. For example, “perceived-blossoming-tree” is the noema

of the perception I now have of it. This “noematic meaning” which belongs to every real consciousness, however, is itself nothing real’ (p. 139).

c Cf. *Zeitbewusstsein*, *passim* [i.e. Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Inner Time*: Trans.].

46 The problem of the Ego’s relation to states, actions and qualities, which this second part thematizes, is briefly taken up in *Being and Nothingness* in the chapter ‘Temporality’, pp. 162–5.

47 Cf. hatred as a possibility of my relation to others, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 410–12.

48 *Erlebnis*: lived experience, intentional lived experience.

For the meaning of this term, Sartre, in a note in *Imagination* (p. 160, n. 14), refers to *Ideas*, I, §36, and adds: ‘The term *Erlebnis*, untranslatable into French, comes from the verb *erleben*. *Etwas erleben* means “to live something”. *Erlebnis* has approximately the meaning of *vécu* [lived through] as used in Bergsonian philosophy.’

49 ‘The certain’ and ‘The probable’ constitute the first two of four sections of the study on *The Imaginary*. Only my ‘consciousnesses-of’ are certain in their spontaneous leaping forth towards things; the paradox of these first-degree consciousnesses is that they are simultaneously grasped as pure interiorities and as breaking out towards the things that are outside. Apart from these consciousnesses, every object, as an object *for* consciousness, whether it be my hatred or this table, will also remain dubious, since no intuition will ever be able to deliver it to me once and for all in its totality.

50 Sartre here acknowledges for the first time the appearance of magical processes in consciousness. He would go on to study (in the *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions* of 1939) the strange magical behaviour constituted by emotion, the unreflected flight of a consciousness in the face of a world which violently invades it and which it would like to annihilate.

51 On the possible, cf. *Being and Nothingness*: ‘The for-itself and the being of possibilities’, p. 95. On potentiality, see *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 195–7.

d But it may also be aimed at and reached via the perception of types of behaviour. I hope to explain elsewhere [n. 52] my thinking on the fundamental identity of *all* psychological methods.

52 Sartre was here referring to his treatise on phenomenological psychology, entitled *La Psyché*, written in 1937–8. Having discovered the

notion of ‘psychical object’, as sketched out in the study on the Ego, he developed it by applying it to various states or feelings. But this psychology did not satisfy him, in particular because he was still lacking the idea of ‘nihilation’, which was to be discovered in *Being and Nothingness*. *La Psyché* was thus abandoned. Only one extract was published in 1939: the *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*.

On this point, see the information given in Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Prime of Life*, trans. Peter Green (London: André Deutsch and Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962), pp. 253–6.

53 *Being and Nothingness* explicitly takes off from the conclusions of this essay. In the chapter entitled ‘The self and the circuit of selfness’, the Ego definitively moves over to the domain of the in-itself, which becomes the *raison d’être* of its transcendence, as the latter is established here. ‘In an article in *Recherches philosophiques*, I attempted to show that the Ego does not belong to the domain of the for-itself. I shall not repeat this here. Let us note only the reason for the transcendence of the Ego: as a unifying pole of *Erlebnisse* the Ego is in-itself, not for-itself. If it were of the nature of consciousness, in fact, it would be to itself its own foundation in the translucency of the immediate. But then we would have to say that it is what it is not and that it is not what it is, and this is by no means the mode of being of the “I”. In fact the consciousness which I have of the “I” never exhausts it, and consciousness is not what causes it to come into existence; the “I”

is always given as *having been* there before consciousness—and at the same time as possessing depths which have to be revealed gradually. Thus the Ego appears to consciousness as a transcendent in-itself, as an existent in the human world, not as of the nature of consciousness’ (*Being and Nothingness*, p. 103).

e *Ideas*, I, §131, pp. 313–16.

54 Because it is by no means certain that in the perception of a thing, each consciousness (of the qualities of that thing) is immediately related to anything other than itself. In fact, it is absolutely not the case, since precisely there is an autonomy of the unreflected consciousness.

55 Husserl takes the example of a melody in his *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, §14, pp. 37–8.

f Husserl in any case is perfectly well aware of this kind of synthetic totality, to which he devoted a remarkable study: *Logical Investigations*, II,



Investigation III, pp. 435–89.

56 For the world to appear in the background of things, our habitual categories of apprehension of the world have to be broken down. In fact, their grasp gives us access only to the spatio-temporal world of science. But it happens that suddenly another world arises, as a naked presence, behind the broken instruments.

57 This is another reference to *La Psyché*. Cf. *The Imaginary*, Part 4, section 3 ('The pathology of the imagination'). See also note 52, above.

58 Thus desire is described by Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* as 'an attitude aiming at enchantment' (p. 394).

59 'The ambiguity is brought to light in Bergson's theory of the consciousness which endures and which is a "multiplicity of interpenetration". What Bergson is touching on here is the psychic state, not consciousness conceived as for-itself' (*Being and Nothingness*, p. 166).

60 This is why the Ego plays a great role in the self-imprisonment of consciousness, i.e. in the types of behaviour associated with bad faith. Cf. *Being and Nothingness*, Part 1, ch. 2, pp. 47–70.

61 Sartre would later analyse, in *The Imaginary*, the implications of the activities of consciousness which proceeds to reify meaning. Expressive mimicry, for instance, can include within itself a relationship of possession, in the magical sense, between the meaning to be conveyed and the matter in which it takes form (face, flesh, body):

'an imitator is one possessed' (Part one, ch. 2, section 3).

62 Thus 'the desire *compromises* me; I am the accomplice of my desire' (*Being and Nothingness*, p. 388).

63 Cf. the introductory section, 'The pursuit of being', in *Being and Nothingness*, pp. xxi–xliii.

64 In the 'unity of a single concrete cogitatio', according to *Ideas*, I, §38, p. 79.

65 In an article in the *Nouvelle Revue française*, perhaps 'Sur un nouveau mal du siècle', published in 1924, reprinted in *Essais critiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1931), p.

14; it is a frequent theme for Marcel Arland; see in the same collection his essay on Oscar Wilde, p. 118.

g As in the case where the passionate man [n. 66], attempting to convey the fact that he does not know how far his passion will take him, says, 'I am afraid of *myself*.'

66 Cf. the analysis of the passionate man by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Citadel Press, 1967), pp. 62–7; and *Being and Nothingness*, Part 1, ch. 2: ‘Patterns of bad faith’, p. 55.

67 Because ‘it is as an object that I appear to the Other’, as is shown in *Being and Nothingness*, p. 222.

68 Cf. *Being and Nothingness*, Part 3, ch. 2, ‘The body’, pp. 306–39. ‘My body’s depth of being is for *me* this perpetual “outside” of my most intimate “inside”’ (p. 353).

69 On the enterprise of Descartes, see the article in Sartre’s *Situations I* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), entitled ‘La liberté cartésienne’, pp. 314–35.

70 Léon Brunschvicg, ‘Vie intérieure et vie spirituelle’, a paper delivered at the Naples International Philosophy Congress (May 1924), published in the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* (April–June 1925), then republished in *Ecrits philosophiques*, vol. II (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1954).

71 All *Erlebnis* is accessible to reflection: this affirmation explains the renewal of psychology due to the phenomenological descriptive method. It indeed founds the reflective studies of the unreflected: studies of emotion, or the imaginary, or even those of *Being and Nothingness*. These latter are, in fact, nothing other than the implementation of the conclusions of *The Transcendence of the Ego*. The same was true of the unpublished study on *La Psyché*.

72 Sartre is here alluding to the Freudians.

73 It seems that, at the time Sartre was writing the *Transcendence* (1934), he was still not giving to the concept of liberty the importance and range that it would have in *Being and Nothingness*. How otherwise are we to understand a sentence such as, ‘Consciousness takes fright at its own spontaneity because it senses that it lies *beyond* freedom’? Freedom, here, is understood on analogy with responsibility and will, which have been alluded to, i.e. it is restricted to the transcendent sphere of ethics. Consequently, Sartre can see in freedom, as his words in *The Transcendence of the Ego* put it, a ‘special case’ within the transcendental field constituted by immediate spontaneities. Freedom is to spontaneity



what the Ego and psychological life in general are to the impersonal transcendental consciousness.

In *Being and Nothingness*, freedom and spontaneity have come together. Freedom has become coextensive with the whole consciousness. Of course, freedom is *also* an ethical concept—it is even the fundamental concept of ethics—insofar as my act is an expression of it. But the free act is based on a more primitive freedom, which is none other than the very structure of consciousness in its pure translucency. More than being a concept, freedom is ‘the stuff of my being’, it pervades me through and through.

Cf. *Being and Nothingness*, Part 4, ch. 1: ‘Being and doing: Freedom’, pp. 433– 556.

74 This example is taken from Pierre Janet’s work entitled *Les Névroses*.

What Sartre has to say about it, and what he says about the unconscious in general in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, enables one to measure the distance that now separates him from his 1934 positions, as far as psychoanalysis is concerned.

The importance of this change needs to be emphasized. The shift was already evident when Sartre published his study *Baudelaire* in 1947 (English translation by Martin Turnell (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1949)); today [1965: Trans.] he has totally reconsidered the problems raised by neuroses and psychoses, and would certainly not explain them in such a simplistic fashion as he did in 1934. In particular, he views as puerile his former interpretation of the neurotic attitude of the ‘young bride’ treated by Janet; he would no longer say that ‘nothing in her upbringing, in her past, or in her character can serve as an explanation’; he would here abandon the notion of explanation for that of *dialectical understanding*, which must necessarily start out from that past, that upbringing, that character.

Simone de Beauvoir in *The Prime of Life* gives an account of the reasons for which Sartre had previously rejected psychoanalysis; see pp. 22–3 and 106.

75 Hence the ontological possibility of behaving in bad faith.

76 Cf. *Being and Nothingness*, Part 4, ch. 1, section 3: ‘Freedom and responsibility’: ‘Man being condemned to be free carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders; he is responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being’ (p. 553).

77 Cf. *Being and Nothingness*, Part 3, ch. 1: ‘The reef of solipsism’ (p. 223ff), in particular section 3: ‘Husserl, Hegel, Heidegger’ (p. 233), where Sartre summarizes and criticizes the attempts to refute solipsism set out by Husserl in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* and *Cartesian Meditations*. Sartre acknowledges that the solution proposed in *The Transcendence of the Ego* is inadequate: ‘Formerly I believed that I could escape solipsism by refuting Husserl’s concept of the existence of the Transcendental “Ego”. At that time I thought that since I had emptied my consciousness of its subject, nothing remained there which was privileged as compared to the Other. But actually although I am still persuaded that the hypothesis of a transcendental subject is useless and disastrous, abandoning it does not help one bit to solve the question of the existence of Others. Even if outside the empirical Ego there is *nothing other than* the consciousness of that Ego — that is, a transcendental field without a subject—the fact remains that my affirmation of the Other demands and requires the existence beyond the world of a similar transcendental field. Consequently the only way to escape solipsism would be here again to prove that my transcendental consciousness is in its very being affected by the extramundane existence of other consciousnesses of the same type.

Because Husserl has reduced being to a series of meanings, the only connection which he has been able to establish between my being and that of the Other is a connection of *knowledge*. Therefore Husserl could not escape solipsism any more than Kant could’ (p. 235).

To get rid of solipsism once and for all, it is necessary to resort to Hegel’s intuition that consists of making ‘me depend on the Other *in my being*’ (p. 237), and to radicalize that intuition. Sartre gives his conclusions on pp. 250–2.

78 This is the ‘alimentary philosophy’ criticized in the article on intentionality in the *Nouvelle Revue française* (see note 17, above).

79 Sartre subjects this absurd materialism to criticism in ‘Matérialisme et révolution’, *Situations*, III, pp. 135–228.

80 Various articles in *Situations* (I to VI), the *Entretiens sur la politique*, and especially the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* all bear witness to the continuity, in Sartre, of the ethical and political preoccupations that are here phenomenologically founded. *Situations V* is now available as *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, trans.

Azzedine Haddour, Steve Brewer, and Terry McWilliams (London and New

York:  
Routledge, 2001).